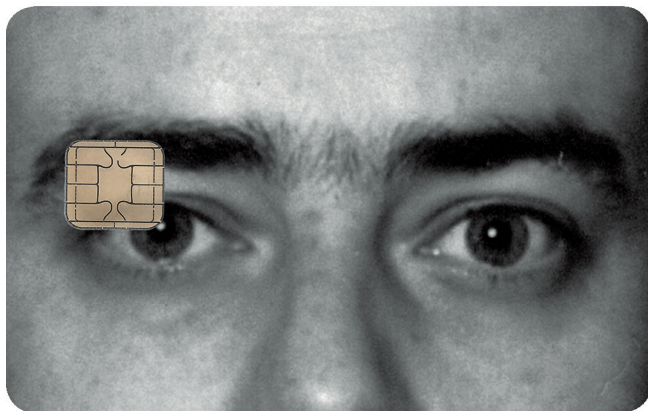




TROIKA



Domenico Quaranta





TROIKA



Domenico Quaranta



Domenico Quaranta (Edited by)

Troika

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IN THE SUMMER 2007, THREE ARTISTS LIVING IN LJUBLJANA, EMIL HRVATIN, DAVIDE GRASSI, AND ŽIGA KARIŽ, CHANGED THEIR NAMES TO "JANEZ JANŠA", THE NAME OF THE PRIME MINISTER OF SLOVENIA AND LEADER OF THE SDS (SLOVENIAN DEMOCRATIC PARTY).^[1]

This incipit, quoted from a text by art critic Amelia Jones, appears in a similar form in almost every essay, review or exhibition caption written since then about the work of the three artists known under the name of Janez Janša. When considering their artistic career, it seems impossible to disregard this particular biographical event. Similarly, it seems extremely hard to consider this event as something other than an art project. This text is not about the name change, but before going any further we need to take account of what the three artists repeat like a mantra: that the name change was “an intimate, personal decision, which requires no public rationalization”.^[2]

pp. 6 - 7
Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Double Citizenship, 2013

1 Amelia Jones, "Naming Power and the Power of the Name: Janez Janša Performs the Political in/for the Art World", in VVAA, *Name Readymade*, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana 2008, p. 33.

2 Blaž Lukan, "The Janez Janša Project", in VVAA, *Name Readymade*, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana 2008, p. 13.

For Personal Reasons



15. Stalno prebivališče/Permanent residence/Domicile





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Some time before the name change, Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi, and Žiga Kariž joined the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS). What they got in return were three SDS membership cards and a letter from Janez Janša welcoming them to the party, with the SDS slogan: “The more of us there are, the faster we will reach our goal.” It’s hard to say whether the three artists had already decided to change their name before joining the SDS or whether the decision was prompted by an over-literal interpretation of this slogan. What we do know is that on July 30, 2007, right after the name change, they wrote a letter to Janez Janša, then prime minister of the Republic of Slovenia, saying:

OUR DECISION WAS A CONSCIOUS ONE AND IT CAME ABOUT AS A RESULT OF CAREFUL CONSIDERATION. FOR US, THERE ARE NO BOUNDARIES BETWEEN OUR WORK, OUR ART, AND OUR LIVES, AND, IN THIS RESPECT, WE BELIEVE WE ARE NO DIFFERENT FROM YOU. WE LIVE FOR WHAT WE CREATE AND, WITH YOUR PERMISSION, WE WOULD LIKE TO QUOTE HERE THE WORDS FROM THE LETTER YOU SENT US WHEN WE JOINED SDS: "THE MORE OF US THERE ARE, THE FASTER WE WILL REACH OUR GOAL."^[3]

The SDS is Slovenia’s right wing party, and since 1993 it has been led by Janez Janša. A dissident and national hero during the final years of the Yugoslavian regime, he later gave his party a radical populist revamp, and was accused by social scientists like Rudi Rizman of nationalist and xenophobic rhetoric.^[4] A quick look at the previous works of the three artists suffices to reveal that they did not share the ideology of the party they joined, and that they were not big fans of Janez Janša. However, they joined the party and, after “careful consideration”, they changed their names.

3 The translation of the original version of the letter in Slovenian is available in VVAA, *Name Readymade*, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana 2008, p. 9.

4 Rudolf M. Rizman, "Radical Right Politics in Slovenia", in *The radical right in Central and Eastern Europe since 1989*, Penn State Press, 1999, pp. 159 – 162.

It would be tempting to view this decision as an act of “subversive affirmation” or “over-identification”, and many find this interpretation appealing. According to Inke Arns and Sylvia Sasse, when the system manages to co-opt and appropriate even the most critical viewpoints, subversive affirmation becomes the only effective strategy of resistance.

WITH AFFIRMATION THERE SIMULTANEOUSLY OCCURS A DISTANCING FROM, OR REVELATION OF, WHAT IS BEING AFFIRMED. IN SUBVERSIVE AFFIRMATION THERE IS ALWAYS A SURPLUS WHICH DESTABILIZES AFFIRMATION AND TURNS IT INTO ITS OPPOSITE.^[5]



The 9th Summer Sport Games of the SDS Party, Celje, 2007

Subversive affirmation has often been accomplished by borrowing the language, habits, postures and symbols of the identity one wants to criticize. Some activists and artists, most notably The Yes Men, have got to the point of publicly interpreting the identity they want to “correct”^[6] in public or on the mass media, even launching fake support campaigns.

5 Inke Arns, Sylvia Sasse, "Subversive Affirmation: On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance", in *Maska*, Spring 2006, Vol. XXI, Issue 98-99, p. 6.

6 The Yes Men call their tactic "identity correction", describing it as: "Impersonating big-time criminals in order to publicly humiliate them, and otherwise giving journalists excuses to cover important issues." Cf. <http://theyesmen.org/>.

Joining a party and legally changing your identity might look like a way to take this strategy to extremes – but is this what the three Slovenian artists actually wanted to do? After joining the SDS, they never enacted their new identity in a “fanatical” way^[7] – quite the contrary, they continued to be who they were before, occasionally doing work that was openly critical of SDS politics.^[8] They never used the “power” their name gave to them to publicly attack Janez Janša, “correct” his identity or force him and his party to expose their dark side, and they didn’t capitalise on this when it eventually happened – for example, right before and after the release of the documentary movie *My Name is Janez Janša* (2012).^[9] And even if they were frequently featured in national and international media after the name change, they were not going to change the public perception of the person behind that name. Google Janez Janša, and you’ll immediately see that most of the information is still about him, the politician, and not about them, the artists.

But even if we stop viewing the name change as an act of over-identification, we might still be tempted to see it as a performative gesture of some kind. So, let’s spend a minute thinking about the implications of the name change on the lives of these artists. Legally changing your name doesn’t mean just picking out a new name for whatever reason – it also means rejecting your former name, with all its implications. It means – or at least, for the people around you it means rejecting your past, your family name, and for two of the three artists, who were not Slovenian by birth – your nationality.

7 According to Slavoj Žižek, for the ruling ideology “the enemy is the ‘fanatic’ who ‘over-identifies’ instead of keeping an adequate distance.” Cf. “Das Unbehagen in der Liberal-Demokratie”, in *Heaven Sent*, Issue 5, 1992, p. 49. Quoted and translated in Inke Arns, Sylvia Sasse, “Subversive Affirmation: On Mimesis as a Strategy of Resistance”, p. 10.

8 An example of this comes from *Slovene National Theatre*, a performance “re-invoicing” fragments of the media storm that blew up around an episode of racism that occurred in Slovenia in 2006 against a Gypsy family. For more information, cf. Antonio Caronia, Janez Janša, Domenico Quaranta (Eds.), *Re:akt! Reconstruction, Re-enactment, Re-reporting*, Link Editions 2013, pp. 92 – 97.

9 While the movie was yet to be released, the right wing press claimed that it featured scandalous content, including pornography, homoeroticism and footage of Nazis and Fascists. For more information, cf. Jela Krečič, “Who is Afraid of Janez Janša? The unfinished film *My Name Is Janez Janša* is creating a stir”, in *Delo*, 5 April 2012, available online at www.janezjansa.si/pdf/2012_04_05_delo_krecic_who_is_afraid_of_janez_jansa_eng.pdf (translated by Sunčan Stone) and Marcel Štefanič, jr., “I am Janez Janša! An exclusive insight into the documentary that has stirred up Slovenia without anyone having even seen it”, in *Mladina*, 18 May 2012, online at www.janezjansa.si/pdf/2012_05_18_mladina_stefancic_jaz-sem-janez-jansa_eng.pdf (translated by Polona Petek).

It means explaining your decision to your children, your partner, your parents, your friends – to people who might not be satisfied with the explanation that you are doing it “for personal reasons”. In different ways for the three individuals involved, the name change caused a bit of family drama.

Furthermore, for an artist who has worked hard for years trying to turn his name into a “brand”, and succeeded in making it recognizable in specialized circuits internationally, changing your name also means restarting your artistic career. And, in this specific case, restarting your artistic career under a name that is already a strong brand, especially in the country where you live and work, and that doesn’t identify you in the first place. Not to mention restarting your artistic career with a name you now share with two significant cultural players and public figures active in the same community, in the same field you are trying to succeed in, both locally and internationally.

For the average artist, this kind of art project might not be worth the bother. And for it to be worth it, the artist would at least do their best to clearly deliver the message they wanted to get across. I want to show that the body is obsolete, Stelarc says: and in order to do it, he grows a semi-living ear on his arm. Fine. I want to show that the female body is shaped by a fake ideal of beauty, Orlan says: and in order to do so, she uses plastic surgery to deform herself. Fine. But Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša keep saying that the name change is an intimate, personal decision, and the messages they have delivered in subsequent works are layered, sometimes contradictory, and in most cases don’t touch on the name change itself, but the very fact of having a name. And even if we assume that the three Slovenian artists are not average artists, but exceptional ones, interpreting the name change as an art project seems reductive compared to the impact it has had on their lives, and the side effects that it keeps having on the perception of their work.

Not an Artwork



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Wedding Ceremony, Ljubljana, 2007



So, let's take them seriously. Let's suppose that, at some point in their life, three individuals from Slovenia decided that they needed to make a big change in their lives. They wanted to leave their identities behind, and start a new identity together. They wanted to set up a difficult situation, start a new life in that situation, and analyze its consequences on their life and work. It wasn't an art project: it was a life project.

There are many ways to give your life a complete turnover. Some people go to live in another country. Some change sex. Some become priests, nuns, monks, hermits. Some reject civilization and build a wilderness cabin. Some become tramps. The three Slovenian artists decided to join a party they presumably didn't share the ideology of, and take on the name of that party's leader. They decided to become Janez Janša.

A complete transformation it was, but it didn't include the rejection of their identity as artists. They kept doing artworks, both individually and together. If an artist goes to live in another country, changes sex, becomes a monk etc., this choice arguably affects his work. And for artists that don't see any boundary "between our work, our art, and our lives", the more intimate, profound and personal the change in life is, the more it affects their work. But even if it affects their work, this doesn't mean that it is an art project in itself, unless this is explicitly stated.

Which it wasn't.

But why is it so important to view this name change as a life event, not an art project? The first answer is implicit in all we have said so far. Art is an act of communication and content creation. In art, you are not allowed to do something without a meaning. You can, as many have done, claim that you are creating an event, or an image, not in order to say something, but in order to trigger a reaction, to involve people in a process and a dialogue: and this feedback is, in all its complexity, the content of the work. But, in the case of the three artists' name change, people's reaction is always very narrow: for most, if an artist borrows the name of a prominent political persona, he wants to celebrate or criticize that person, or get media attention.

Additionally, people and the media may enjoy the kind of freedom that the artist allows them by turning a proprietary name into a shared name, that therefore no longer identifies a single person: this is what happened when, in 2007, Croatian journalist Ivo Sanader published the article “Is Janez Janša an Idiot?”.^[10] This is significant “collateral damage” that

Slovenija, moj deželovič

Ali je Janez Janša kreten?



Ivo Sanader

Umetnika je – za razliko od politikov – povsem legitimno imenovati bedak, njegovo idejo pa trparijo. Umetniki so nenevarna bitja in nimajo močnih odvetnikov.

Ivo Sanader
Is Janez Janša an Idiot?
Objektiv, Dnevnik Daily,
2007

V normalnih okoliščinah – če bi poznal hitro naravo Janeza Janše in njegovo nagurnost, da je zaradi velika manjših stvari ključ svoje odvetnike in pite tožbe zaradi obrekovanja – se človek ne bi mogel z lahkoto odločiti, da javno postavi gornje vprašanje. Uredniki Dnevnika bi se posvetovali s pravno službo in bi besedilo verjetno vrgli v koš, še preden bi prišli do tistega dela besedila, kjer pravim: da, Janez Janša je kreten, kot ga svet še ni videl. Da pa ne bom ostal le pri imenovanju Janše za kretena brez kakršne koli obrazložitve, naj še rečem, da je njegova ideja o mejah, ki jo pridiga po Evropi, ena prav velika trparija.

Kaj se je torej spremenilo, da lahko zdaj v časopis svobodno napišete, da je Janez Janša idiot?

Morda bo kdo rekel, da je prišlo do senzacionalnega odkritja, da je Janez Janša pravzaprav Hrvat, rojen na Reki. In ker je ena od pridobitev naših državnih neodvisnosti tudi to, da je družbena sprejemljivost na Hrvaškem Slovence imenovati kretene, v Sloveniji pa Hrvate idiote – in če pri tem poznate moj vrojeni refleks blatenja vsega hrvaškega – mi to dejstvo, da je Janez Janša pravzaprav Hrvat, odpira, vidite, prostor, da lahko v slovenskem časopisu o tej budali povem vse, kar si mislim.

Vendar ne gre le zato, da je Janez Janša Hrvat. Janša je namreč še nekaj veliko hujšega – umetnik.

Govorim seveda o Emilu Hrvatinu, mojem vrstniku in rojaku, po rodu z Reke, danes uglednem in znanem slovenskem konceptualnem umetniku, režiserju in uredniku gledališčnega časopisa Maska. Pred nekaj dnevi se je namreč Hrvatin uradno preimenoval v Janeza Janšo in pod tem imenom sodeloval na berlinskem festivalu Tanz im August, kjer je z vrsto eksperimentalnih akcij in performansov preizprašal odnos liberalnega kapitalizma do koncepta moje in ideje prehajanja čezjo.

Ker govorimo o konceptualnem, čeprav administrativno veljavnem umetniškem dejanju, rad pristajam na sodelovanje v tem sijajnem performansu, pač tako, kot sem ga razumel. Torej kot priložnost, da sprejem njegov poziv, prečkam zamišljeno mejo tudi javno v časopisu in napišem, da je Janez Janša ena navadna

shouldn't be underestimated: with their name change, as Blaž Lukan correctly notes, the artists turned the name “Janez Janša” into an “empty signifier”,^[11] allowing the media to use it in ways that weren't available when that signifier could only be publicly associated with one specific person (the politician), and effectively contributing to “undermin[ing] the real ideological, economic, and political power of the owner.”^[12] But this

10 Ivo Sanader is itself a pseudonym used on this occasion by Croatian journalist and writer Boris Dežulović, who signed the article with the name of the Croatian Prime Minister at the time, thus playfully turning a philosophical statement into a affair of state. Cf. Ivo Sanader, “Ali je Janez Janša kreten?”, in *Objektiv*, Dnevnik Daily, September 1, 2007.

11 Blaž Lukan, “The Janez Janša Project”, in VVAA, *Name Readymade*, Moderna Galerija, Ljubljana 2008, p. 23.

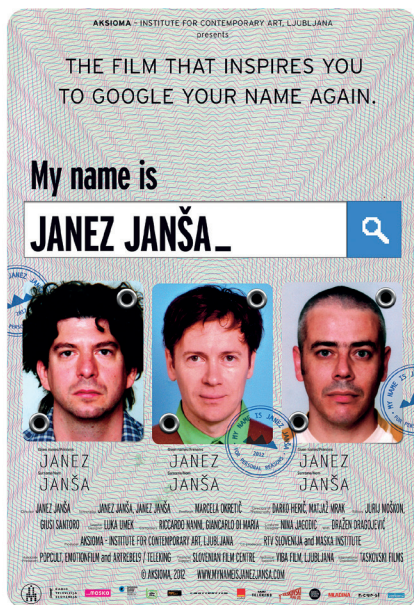
12 Ibidem, p. 22. Here, “owner” should be better understood as “carrier”.

isn't, as Lukan puts it, "the goal of the act of changing one's name", but one of the many possible effects of it: effects that, as we will see below, the artists subjected to further scrutiny, and capitalised on to generate new work.

In life, it's different. In life, you are allowed to take meaningless decisions, or do things for stupid reasons. In life, you can decide to change your name to Janez Janša simply because you like the sound of it. In life, you are allowed to give a different answer every time somebody asks why you did it. In life, you are allowed to be contradictory, vain, ambiguous, complex or dumb, all rolled into one.

In other words, as an art project, the name change can only have one meaning. As a life event, it's free to have none, or many.

The second answer is more related to the understanding of the works that the three artists developed after the name change. Most of them – especially the ones they worked on together – are strongly related to their new identity, or to what it means to have an identity in the age



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
My Name is Janez Janša, 2012

of biopolitics. If we consider the name change as an art project, these works can only be intended as performance documentation. And since, as we have seen, the name change as performance can only have one meaning, their only function becomes that of documenting, certifying and amplifying that meaning. Their declared intention becomes secondary to that of documenting the “Janez Janša project”; their specificity as autonomous artworks is lost. If, for example, we understand the name change as an act of subversive affirmation against Janez Janša the politician, exhibiting the legal documents is merely certification of this performative gesture; the documentary movie *My Name is Janez Janša* is reduced to an act of political propaganda; the act of signing a signature – especially if performed in symbolic public spaces – is reduced to an act of identity theft.

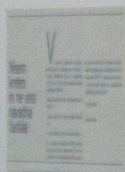


Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Signature (Hollywood Walk of Fame),
 Los Angeles, 2007

Life Documentation



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Work, Mali salon / MMSU, Rijeka, 2013



The concept of “art documentation” was recently discussed by Boris Groys in one of the essays in *Art Power*. According to Groys,

ART DOCUMENTATION IS BY DEFINITION NOT ART; IT MERELY REFERS TO ART, AND IN PRECISELY THIS WAY IT MAKES IT CLEAR THAT ART, IN THIS CASE, IS NO LONGER PRESENT AND IMMEDIATELY VISIBLE BUT RATHER ABSENT AND HIDDEN. ^[13]

Groys goes on to distinguish two forms of art documentation: the documentation of a past event, be it a performance, a happening, a temporary installation; and documentation of an artistic activity that doesn't belong to the past, but that doesn't serve to produce a finished artwork either.

EXAMPLES INCLUDE COMPLEX AND VARIED ARTISTIC INTERVENTIONS IN DAILY LIFE, LENGTHY AND COMPLICATED PROCESSES OF DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS, THE CREATION OF UNUSUAL LIVING CIRCUMSTANCES, ARTISTIC EXPLORATION INTO THE RECEPTION OF ART IN VARIOUS CULTURES AND MILIEUS, AND POLITICALLY MOTIVATED ARTISTIC ACTIONS. ^[14]

According to Groys, in this case art documentation “is the only possible form of reference to an artistic activity that cannot be represented in any other way.” If, in the first case, documentation is a form of adapting anti-institutional practices to an institutional framework (and responding to the art market's need for physical artifacts), in the latter art documentation becomes the only possible form for what Groys describes as art in the age of biopolitics.

13 Boris Groys, “Art in the Age of Biopolitics: From Artwork to Art Documentation”, in *Art Power*, The MIT Press, Cambridge – Massachusetts, London – England 2008, p. 53.

14 Ibidem, p. 54

FOR THOSE WHO DEVOTE THEMSELVES TO THE PRODUCTION OF ART DOCUMENTATION RATHER THAN ARTWORKS, ART IS IDENTICAL TO LIFE, BECAUSE LIFE IS ESSENTIALLY A PURE ACTIVITY THAT HAS NO END RESULT. [...] ART DOCUMENTATION [...] MARKS THE ATTEMPT TO USE ARTISTIC MEDIA WITHIN ART SPACES TO REFER TO LIFE ITSELF, THAT IS, TO A PURE ACTIVITY, TO PURE PRACTICE, TO AN ARTISTIC LIFE, AS IT WERE, WITHOUT PRESENTING IT DIRECTLY. ART BECOMES A LIFE FORM, WHEREAS THE ARTWORK BECOMES NON-ART, A MERE DOCUMENTATION OF THIS LIFE FORM. ONE COULD ALSO SAY THAT ART BECOMES BIOPOLITICAL, BECAUSE IT BEGINS TO USE ARTISTIC MEANS TO PRODUCE AND DOCUMENT LIFE AS A PURE ACTIVITY. INDEED, ART DOCUMENTATION AS AN ART FORM COULD ONLY DEVELOP UNDER THE CONDITIONS OF TODAY'S BIOPOLITICAL AGE, IN WHICH LIFE ITSELF HAS BECOME THE OBJECT OF TECHNICAL AND ARTISTIC INTERVENTION.^[15]

This long quotation correctly outlines the conceptual framework in which we can interpret both the name change and the work produced by Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša in the years that followed. The name change is not an art project, but an event in an artistic life (“for us, there are no boundaries between our work, our art, and our lives”); and the artworks related to the name change are not the documentation of a performance, but the documentation of life as pure activity.

15 Ibid.

Troika

Party - SDS) have recently changed their names to Janez Janša.
If you have not been made aware of this, we are pleased that we can
the news firsthand.

Our decision was a conscious one and it came about as a result of
consideration. For us, there are no boundaries between our work, our
our lives, and, in this respect, we believe we are no different from you
for what we create and, with your permission, we would like to quote
words from the letter you sent **us** **when we** joined your party.
"The more of us there are, the faster we'll reach our goal!"

We are looking forward to your response.



THE DOMINANT MEDIUM OF MODERN BIOPOLITICS IS THUS BUREAUCRATIC AND TECHNOLOGICAL DOCUMENTATION, WHICH INCLUDES PLANNING, DECREES, FACT-FINDING REPORTS, STATISTICAL INQUIRIES, AND PROJECT PLANS. IT IS NO COINCIDENCE THAT ART ALSO USES THE SAME MEDIUM OF DOCUMENTATION WHEN IT WANTS TO REFER TO ITSELF AS LIFE. ^[16]

After the name change, Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša employed different strategies of “art documentation” that should briefly be looked at separately:

- They performed in the public arena, together or separately, generating images that subtly embody the contrast between their identity, the context in which the action is performed, and references to symbols, historical or recent events, and previous artworks in some way embedded in these images. This is the case, for example, in *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* (2007), a performance in

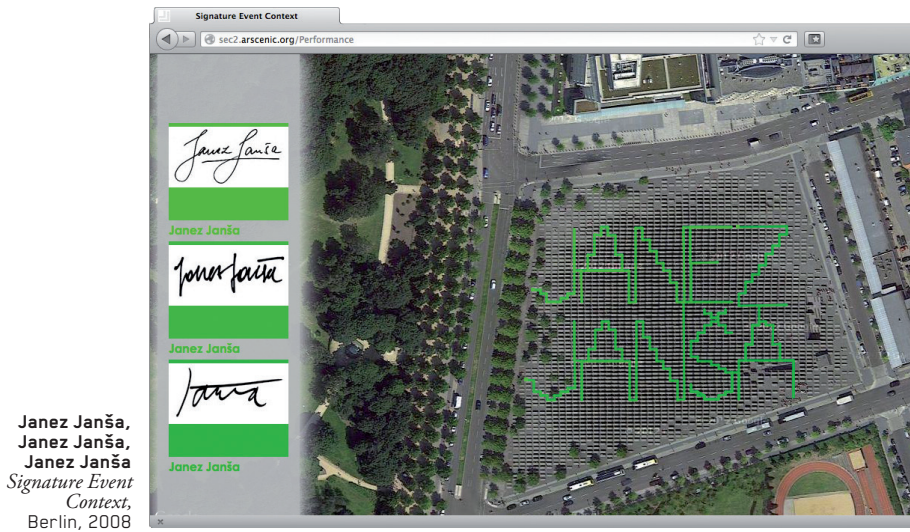


OHO
Mount Triglav, Ljubljana, 1968

16 Ibidem, p. 56.

which the Janšas re-enacted a historical performance by the group OHO (*Mt Triglav*, 1968), already referenced by the Irwin group in a 2004 work; and, more recently, in *I Love Germany* (2013), in which the Janšas pose in different situations wearing t-shirts bearing the title of the series. We will discuss this work in depth further on.

- They publicly performed the act of signing or displaying their signature, exploring the issues of authorship, originality, colonization and self-affirmation implied by the act of signing. For example, in *Signature Event Context* (2008), performed at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, equipped with a GPS device and continuously repeating “Jaz sem Janez Janša” (“I am Janez Janša”), they took



different paths through the corridors of the Memorial, assembling a common signature that was only visible on the internet, in an attempt to affirm their identity while re-contextualizing the site of signature. A re-contextualization that was effected in the many public spaces where they have taken their signature, from the

Hollywood Walk of Fame to the media facade of the Kunsthaus Graz to Copacabana beach in Rio de Janeiro, where the signature was made using beach umbrellas. Finally, in the exhibition *Signature* (2010) they commissioned a painter to translate their signatures into paintings, collected in nine triptychs, that were finally signed by the authors of the project using different combinations of their current and old signatures.

- They exhibited the documentation connected to the name change, including ID cards, passports, their party membership cards, and credit cards. This process started in 2008 with the exhibition *Name Readymade* at Forum Stadtpark, Graz, Austria, where all the documentation related to the name change was displayed in installation form, and the related book; and continued in 2010 with the auction sale of a valid passport, sold as an artwork by Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša for € 1,900, and more recently with the projects *Troika* and *Credits* (2013).
- They recalled the story of the name change, documenting the events and public reactions in narrative form and involving the audience in a public debate about the questions of identity and



Slovenian Parliamentary
Elections
(Press Center),
Ljubljana, 2008

identification, multitude and multiplication, name as interface between the private and the public spheres and personal name as brand. This process started in 2008 with the publication of the book *Janez Janša Biografija*, in which author Marcel Štefančič created a biography of Janez Janša by “collaging” together the lives of the three artists; and continued with the theater performance *The More of Us There Are, the Faster We Will Reach Our Goal* (2010), in which documents, interviews with art experts, politicians, theoreticians and the man in the street were performed by an actor or presented on stage; and the documentary film *My Name is Janez Janša*, which premiered in September 2012.

As can be seen in this short overview, these works both fit into and challenge Groys’ notion of art documentation. On one hand, they can be seen as the documentation of the life of the Janšas in the new circumstances introduced by the name change. On the other hand, most of them go far beyond this very simple level. In his essay, Groys goes on to explain that art documentation is usually presented in the exhibition space in installation form: a medium that allows art documentation to show its true nature (not art, but something that “refers to art”), while at the same time turning it into art by virtue of placing it in a specific space. Referring to Walter Benjamin’s concept of the “topological” aura, Groys concludes: “If reproduction makes copies out of originals, installation makes originals out of copies.”^[17]

These considerations only apply to a small portion of the work developed by Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša after the name change: photographic documentation, certificates, letters, articles on magazines or TV appearances. Most of the other works fall under different media classifications: performances (that were later documented and presented in institutions in installation form), books, movies, and even paintings.

17 Ibidem, p. 64.

Furthermore, some of them became life events in themselves: so, not only documenting the life of the Janšas, but also having an impact on it that is not considered in the model described by Groys. This is the case, for example, of the documentary movie *My Name is Janez Janša*, which not only collects and presents in narrative form the documentation related to the name change, but became, before and after its release, a huge media event in Slovenia and elsewhere, also thanks to the violent reaction of the media close to the SDS and the movie's impact on public debate at an important time in Slovenia's recent history, with the fall of Janez Janša's second government, Janša sentenced to two years at a trial in which he was accused of corruption, the various public protests that took place between November 2012 and March 2013, and the establishment of a new government.

But paradoxically, the works that are most resistant to Groys' model are the ones that make use of that "bureaucratic and technological documentation" that Groys describes as "the dominant medium of modern biopolitics": ID cards, passports, credit cards. This is probably the case because putting these kinds of documents on display in their original form and while they are still valid as legal documents, is so unusual that he didn't even take the eventuality into consideration. Groys' definition of "bureaucratic and technological documentation" applies perfectly to certificates, declarations, letters, CCTV camera records and photographic documentation. Furthermore, for Groys, when this documentation is presented in installation form, it has a mere narrative function: it tells a story not by means of an authored narrative, but by means of providing ephemeral material related to that story. With regard to the work of the Janšas, this definition aptly describes documents like the copy of the letter they sent to Janez Janša; the artists' birth certificates; the letters from the state granting them permission to change their names; the photos showing them at SDS meetings; the photographic documentation of Janez Janša's marriage, where Janez Janša and Janez Janša were invited as his best men, and the related certificate; etc.



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Waiting for JJ,
 Los Angeles, 2007

Everything changes when we start considering ID cards or passports, for example. If these only had a narrative function in the context of an art installation, they could easily be presented in the form of reproductions, whether poor photocopies or high quality photographic prints. But the artists choose to present them as original, valid documents, consciously accepting a series of related risks: identity theft, money loss, damage and even being sued for misusing the documents and leaving them in an “unsafe” place. This makes us forget that they are telling a story, and foregrounds their uncertain status as artworks. What are we confronted with when we meet, say, *Troika* (2013) in an exhibition? The official caption of the work reads:

THE WORK *Troika* DEALS WITH THREE PILLARS OF CONTEMPORARY BIOPOLITICS: POLITICS, LAW AND ECONOMY. THE ARTISTS DISPLAY A SET OF OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS INDICATING THEIR POLITICAL ORIENTATION, LEGAL STATE AND ECONOMICAL WAY OF OPERATING: THREE SDS MEMBERSHIP CARDS, THREE ID CARDS AND THREE MASTERCARDS WITH THE REPRODUCTION OF THEIR EARLIER ACTION *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* [...] THESE DOCUMENTS ARE DISPLAYED IN OPPOSITION TO A VIDEO SHOWING THE LETTER THE THREE ARTISTS WROTE TO THE POLITICIAN JANEZ JANŠA SOON AFTER CHANGING THEIR NAMES.^[18]

This is the story they tell – a story that could be told just as well, if not better in terms of display options, by using reproductions rather than originals. If the artists are showing the originals, temporarily removing them from their wallets, they probably want to tell us something more. More precisely, they want to make us accept their status as artworks, rather than art documentation. But what kind of artworks?

An official document is something released by a public institution or a private company upon request of the holder. The holder herself has little or no control over what the document displays: the elements related to the institution or company (logo, watermark, hologram, microchip) are controlled by the institution or company; the elements related to the holder (name and surname, personal data, photo portrait) have to be as close as possible to reality, so close to be considered “the truth”. Your photo portrait has to look like you as much as possible; the data you provide must be backed up by other official documents. Among the documents included in *Troika*, the only one with some degree of customization is the

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Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Troika (detail), 2013

18 Cf. www.aksioma.org/troika/.



credit card, which features an artwork by Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša as a background image. We will come back to this further on. At this stage we can merely note that official documents are highly codified objects, with little or no room for customization, and that they are functional objects. Their function is to certify something: that Janez Janša – when still Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi, or Žiga Kariž – joined the SDS; that Janez Janša is a male Slovenian citizen who looks like the man pictured on his ID card, that Janez Janša has a bank account at the NLB bank that allows him to be the holder of a credit card, etc. Official documents, however, are not functional forever: they have an expiry date, after which they must be renewed; and they can, under certain circumstances, be revoked. For example, the centerpiece of *Troika* – the ID card of the Janez Janša formerly known as Žiga Kariž – has a hole in it. This certifies that this document is no longer valid, despite the fact that it displays the expiry date “04.07.2018”. The reason is that, after a while, Žiga Kariž decided to return to his original name, and is now using the name Janez Janša as a pseudonym, while living and developing his solo career as Žiga Kariž.

Just to recap: an official document is a temporarily functional object, made by somebody else (an institution, a company) exclusively for the holder. Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša are showing them in art contexts. So, is this an intervention in the long contemporary art tradition of the “readymade”? This might be an appealing hypothesis, but there are several counter-arguments. A readymade is, first of all, the result of an act of choice and selection; these documents have not been chosen: they have been put on display as something that helps tell the story of the three Janez Janša in the framework of the existing political, legal and economic infrastructure. When it’s chosen, a readymade loses its function and becomes the subject of an aesthetic or

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Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Troika (detail), 2013



philosophical investigation;^[19] these documents are still valid and functional objects, at least until they expire or are revoked. Also, a readymade is not unique, neither as a mass produced, manufactured object nor as a work of art.^[20] Although industrially produced according to a template, these documents are unique, both as documents and as works of art: an ID card cannot be replicated without breaking the law, and the artwork Troika cannot be converted into an art edition.

Lastly, with readymades functionality is lost by means of some kind of material or conceptual intervention: selection, display, signature, re-naming, re-framing, assemblage; in *Troika*, the documents have been selected (among other documents), presented on wall in a perspex frame, in the context of an installation called *Troika* that also includes a video and a wall painting, and that an exhibition caption certifies as the work of Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša: but this isn't enough to make these documents lose their functional status. They can be "also art", but they can't be "just art" – at least, until somebody else – a public official, an authorized employee, but not the artist and definitely not a curator – releases them from their functional status of documents.

In other words, the rituals of the art world and its officials can't change the nature of these objects because they are not plain objects: they are sacred objects belonging to another, stronger ritual, controlled by other officials.

In this respect, the artists are not even responsible for their existence. Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi and Žiga Kariž didn't ask for an SDS membership card: they applied to become members of the SDS. Janez Janša,

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Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Troika (detail), 2013

19 Although, as Marcel Duchamp explained, "this choice was based on a reaction of visual indifference with at the same time a total absence of good or bad taste — in fact a complete anesthesia." Cf. Marcel Duchamp, "Lecture at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, October 19, 1961". Published in *Art and Artists*, 1, 4, London, July 1966.

20 Duchamp: "Another aspect of the 'readymade' is its lack of uniqueness... The replica of the 'readymade' delivering the same message; in fact nearly every one of the 'readymades' existing today is not an original in the conventional sense." Ibidem.



Janez Janša and Janez Janša didn't ask for new ID cards: they applied for a name change, and the new ID cards were a side effect of that. In other words, rather than documenting their life choices, these artifacts are objects that were spontaneously and autonomously produced by systems in response to them; the objectified reaction of the system to an individual's decision.

Almost anything you do in modern society produces a similar response: you are born and you get a birth certificate; you go to school, get married, divorce, have children, get a job, lose a job, make money, pay your taxes, buy furniture at Ikea, a pair of jeans at the local Levi's store or a book on Amazon, go to the gym, join a political party, and the system delivers the corresponding document. Part of the work of Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša consists in collecting the traces produced by an unusual event in their life (the name change), in terms of both media reaction and institutional procedures, and showing them as they are. They call it "collateral art" because these traces are produced by the media or the political, economic or legal systems as a response to, and a side effect of the name change. As they explain:

THE WORKS, SUCH AS IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS ARE PRODUCED AS A ROUTINE, THEY WOULD BE MADE IN ANY CASE, AS SOON AS SOME CRUCIAL DATA OF IDENTIFICATION OF AN INDIVIDUAL HAS BEEN CHANGED. THERE IS NO CHANCE TO AVOID IT, THERE IS NO WAY THAT WOULD NOT HAPPEN. ^[21]

These documents are, in fact, the result of a collaboration, and their ambiguous nature is a consequence of it: as official documents, they can be handled and manipulated by the system that generated them; as art documentation, they can be shown in the art context. Their existence in these two contexts often gives rise to friction and conflict, with one of

21 Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, "Collateral Art", 2013. Unpublished.

the two systems – usually the art world – having to renounce to some of its rights to these artifacts. As documents, they belong to one of the three artists; as artworks, they belong to all three of them; but the second level of ownership is weaker while they are still valid documents. A wallet is by no means a good system for archiving, protecting and preserving art – but it's extremely useful in a world in which you always have to carry your cards with you. Passports are subject to changes and interventions any time you pass a border, ID cards and credit cards are often unvalidated and physically damaged, or seized, when they expire. When, in November 2010, *PB0241891 (Passport)* was sold at auction, the auction catalogue stated that the artwork (Lot Nr. 12) was “valid also as identification document, expiry date: 06.07.2017”, and the buyer had to



Mag. Andrea Jungmann,
Director of Sotheby's Austria,
auction at Palais Sturany,
Vienna, 2010

accept this condition.^[22] For their part, when the artists first decided in 2008^[23] to put the documents on show, they had to ask the state of Slovenia to issue temporary personal documents to replace them, providing statements and opinions from art experts “certifying” that they had to be shown because they were works of art too.

This also shows how, in order to have the double status of their personal documents recognized, the artists had to request the production of further documentation, collaborating with the institutions and seeking the “complicity” of other institutions. In 2011, when the Museum of Modern Art in Ljubljana tried to include the three identity cards of Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša in its permanent collection, the double status of those objects led the museum to approach the Ministry of Internal Affairs for permission to purchase them - including the documentation which demonstrates their artistic status in the request. The ministry claimed that they were valid documents that should not have any other purpose than that prescribed by the law. In 2013, the museum appealed to the Ministry of Culture to intervene in the situation, which is still ongoing.

The co-existence, and occasional clash, of these two levels in the works of Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša that are based on official documents is not a side element in a practice of “art documentation”, in Groy’s terms: it is exactly what makes them something more than simple documentation of a live event. For the duration of their existence as valid documents, they will be living contradictions, ambiguous artifacts hovering between the realms of life and art, and proving the impossibility of inhabiting both contexts simultaneously. When they expire as official documents, they will not lose their status as artworks, but will join a more stable, common status of artwork: the one enjoyed by both readymades and plain art documentation. The entities that issued them will lose their power and control over

22 Cf. www.aksioma.org/name/auction/ for video documentation of the event.

23 Cf. www.aksioma.org/name/.

them, and they will be ready to be collected and museified. They will experience another form of newness – the one discussed by Boris Groys in these terms in *Art Power*:

THE NEW ARTWORK LOOKS REALLY NEW AND ALIVE ONLY IF IT RESEMBLES, IN A CERTAIN SENSE, EVERY OTHER ORDINARY, PROFANE THING, OR EVERY OTHER ORDINARY PRODUCT OF POPULAR CULTURE. ONLY IN THIS CASE CAN THE NEW ARTWORK FUNCTION AS A SIGNIFIER FOR THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE MUSEUM WALLS. THE NEW CAN BE EXPERIENCED AS SUCH ONLY IF IT PRODUCES AN EFFECT OF OUT-OF-BOUNDS INFINITY – IF IT OPENS AN INFINITE VIEW ON REALITY OUTSIDE OF THE MUSEUM. AND THIS EFFECT OF INFINITY CAN BE PRODUCED, OR, BETTER, STAGED, ONLY INSIDE THE MUSEUM: IN THE CONTEXT OF REALITY ITSELF WE CAN EXPERIENCE THE REAL ONLY AS FINITE BECAUSE WE OURSELVES ARE FINITE. ^[24]

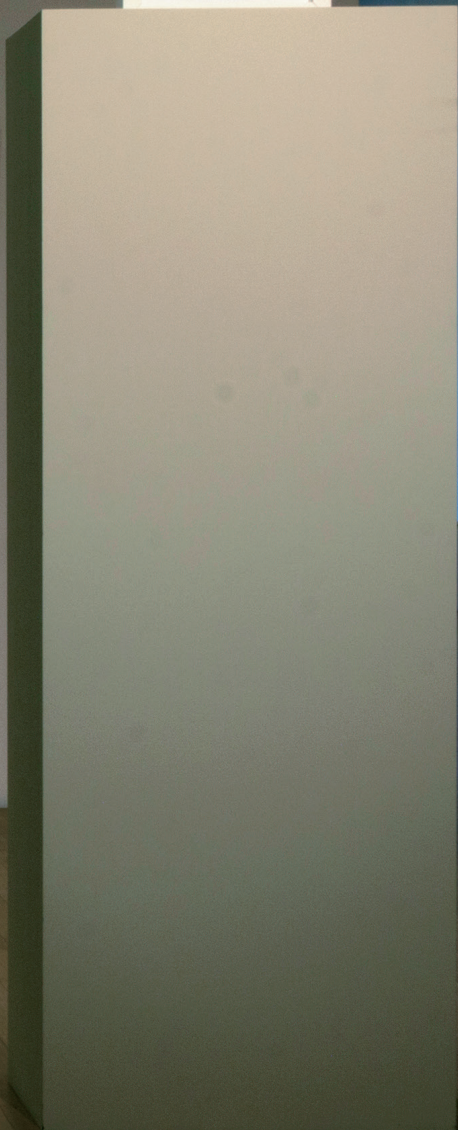
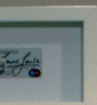
And after that, of course, another form of aging.

24 Boris Groys, "On the New", in *Art Power*, p. 30.

Credits



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Credits, MSUM, Ljubljana, 2013



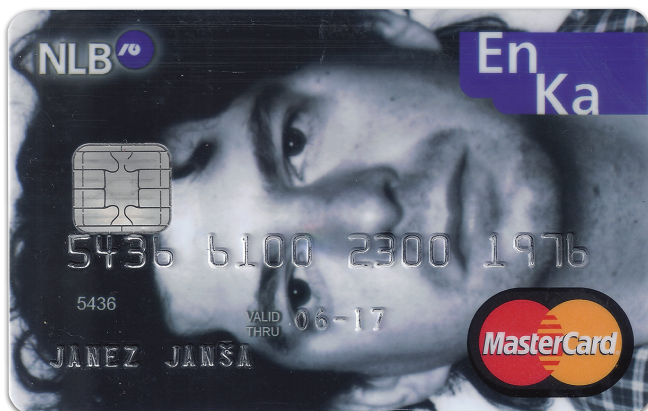
This status is already enjoyed by those documents that have already expired or that, like the ID card of the Janez Janša formerly known as Žiga Kariž, have been revoked. Short term expiry also underpins the *Credits* project (2013), which exploits the recently introduced option of producing customized credit card designs. The artists were attracted, on one hand, by the rhetorical use of concepts like freedom, creativity, personality, uniqueness (“Make your card as unique as you are”) in the advertisements for these services:

[...] DEBIT CARDS FEATURING MOTIFS CHOSEN BY THE USER ARE A TYPICAL PRODUCT OF THE POST-FORDIST MODE OF PRODUCTION, IN WHICH THE FINAL IMAGE OF THE PRODUCT IS ADJUSTED TO THE FINAL USER, WHO THUS GETS THE SENSE THAT HE OR SHE PARTICIPATES IN THE VERY CREATION OF THE PRODUCT, THAT THE PRODUCT IS TAILOR-MADE FOR THEM, THAT THIS PRODUCT MAKES THEM SPECIAL, STANDING OUT FROM THE CROWD. ^[25]

On the other hand, the artists are attracted to the enormous potential that the coexistence and clash between different signifiers — their name, the codified elements of a credit card and the image they choose as a background — combined in a single, miniaturized image, can produce. Furthermore, this project brings collaboration and complicity with institutions and companies to a new level, especially when the image they want to use as the background of their credit cards doesn't comply with the conventional protocol. Lastly, *Credits* is another layer of Janša, Janša and Janša's investigation of the double nature of their “artifacts”, their ability to exist in two different contexts. As they explain in the project statement:

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Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Janez Janša on MasterCard, *Credits* series, 2013

25 Cf. *Credit's* project statement, available at <http://janezjansa.si/credits/index.html>.



JANŠA, JANŠA AND JANŠA RAISE QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE RELATIONS BETWEEN ART AND CAPITAL, BETWEEN THE VIRTUALITY OF THE FINANCIAL SECTOR AND THE REALITY OF THE ARTISTS' POSITION, QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE WAYS IN WHICH THE FINANCIAL SECTOR PERCEIVES ART AND WHAT KIND OF LIMITS IT SETS ON ART [...] BANKS UNDERSTAND DEBIT CARDS AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR MAKING PAYMENTS; AS SOON AS THEY LAND IN A MUSEUM, HOWEVER, THEY START FUNCTIONING AS ARTWORKS. AS WITH OTHER OBJECTS THAT CHARACTERISE THE WORK OF JANŠA, JANŠA AND JANŠA, THE ARTISTRY OF DEBIT CARDS IS TEMPORALLY LIMITED, FOR THEY ARE NO LONGER INTERESTING AS LIVING ART OBJECTS AFTER THEY HAVE PASSED THEIR EXPIRY DATE (THEIR ARTISTRY IS CONSTITUTED PRECISELY BY THIS DOUBLE STATUS); THEY TURN INTO MUSEUM EXHIBITS, DOCUMENTS OF SOMETHING THAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED, REMNANTS, RELICS. ^[26]

This brings us back to our starting point. Although credit cards have an expiry date, when you order a new credit card connected to the same account, the previous card is deactivated. While this should, as the artists say, turn them into relics, this does not actually happen. When confronted with these works, we are still uncomfortable with them and their presence in the gallery or the museum — and we will continue to feel slightly awkward about it even when the expiry date printed on them becomes a thing of the past. It's hard to see them as “documents of something that has already happened”. A rose is a rose and a credit card is a credit card, even when it expires. The card might

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Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Mount Triglav on Gold MasterCard, Credits series, 2013

26 Ibidem.



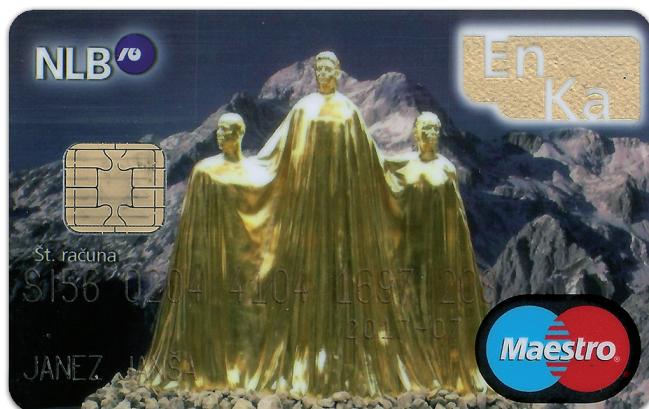
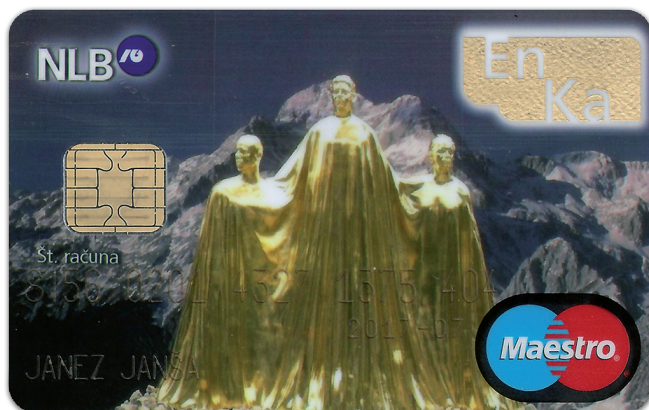
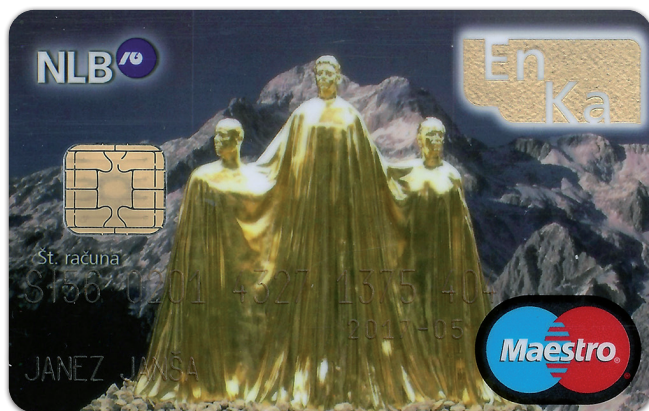
not work anymore, but the MasterCard and Maestro symbols are still there, with all their “aura”. Credit cards have enormous symbolic power. When we get our first credit card, we officially become adults. We keep them with us all the time, we handle them with care, and we use them to shop, travel and enjoy the kind of freedom on offer in a globalized, capitalist economy. Without them, we are nobody. With them, we can do anything. “There are some things money can’t buy. For everything else, there’s MasterCard.” ^[27] By putting them on show, the artists are infringing the pact of trust they made with their bank, and violating the only sacred thing that our godless age has left: Money. This is why, even once they have expired, they will continue to be insidious, two-faced artifacts for a long time.

In spite of this, banks and credit card companies don’t seem to perceive the project as a threat — quite the contrary. When the project started, the artists chose to completely respect the protocol and its specifications. The three MasterCard cards commissioned from the NLB bank and featured in the project *Troika* use a reproduction of *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* as a background image. This choice is meaningful. Mount Triglav — a preeminent symbol of the Slovenian nation — can also be seen on the other two sets of cards composing *Troika*: the SDS membership cards of the artists and their ID cards. Putting this historical and political symbol on a credit card in such a hyper-mediated form — a re-enactment of a re-enactment of a re-enactment — generates so many levels of significance that a book might not be able to cover them all but that can be experienced in one go just by looking at the image. Mount Triglav returns on the first two triptychs of the *Credits*

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Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Golden Triglav on Gold Maestro, Credits series, 2013

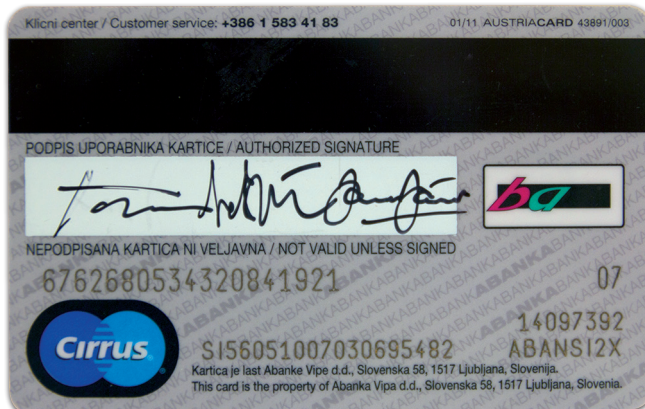
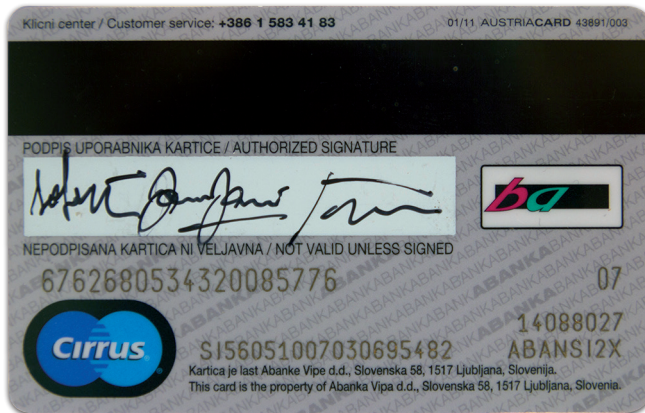
pp. 56 - 57
Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Signatures on Maestro, Credits series, 2013

27 As per a famous MasterCard advertisement.





TROIKA - Credits



series: *Mount Triglav on Golden MasterCard*, where each card displays one of the iterations of the performance — from the OHO Group's original intervention to Irwin's remake, to Janša, Janša and Janša's one; and *Golden Triglav on Golden Maestro*, where the image used on all the cards is the picture of *Monument to the National Contemporary Art (Golden Triglav)*, the sculpture that Janša, Janša and Janša produced in 2008 after their performance. While all of this was possible using the conventional online procedure for ordering a customized credit card, in order to have the next triptych — *Signatures on Maestro* — produced, the artists had to discuss it with the bank, because signatures have a conventional function on credit cards and can't be used as a background image. This led to them entering into communication with the banks involved in the project, providing background information about it and the institutional partners involved. Surprisingly (or not?), the banks seemed to enjoy the fact that artists were using their service as a way to produce artworks, and became supportive in unexpected ways. When, in October 2013, the *Credits* series was put on show at MSUM Ljubljana, the artists were informed by the bank that the cards hadn't been deactivated, even though new cards had been generated for the same account — an exception to the rule made specially for them. For a new piece in the series — called *Masterpiece on MasterCard* and displaying the image of their three ID cards as a background for their credit cards — a local bank agreed to forward the request to the MasterCard headquarters: although supportive, they couldn't handle the request themselves, because the question of displaying a document on another document was too sensitive for a local licensee.

If they are successful, *Masterpiece on MasterCard* will not only be a powerful example of how artists and institutions can, for different and sometimes conflicting reasons, collaborate to produce artifacts that challenge the boundaries between art and life; together with the other works in the series, it will also bring this challenge into the museum.

THE MUSEUM, OR THE GALLERY, IS A SPACE OF TRUST, TOO, IN A CERTAIN WAY. WHILE BANKS KEEP MONEY AND LOOK AFTER IT, FERTILISE IT, LEND IT AND CREATE NEW VALUES WITH IT, MUSEUMS DO PRETTY MUCH THE SAME WITH ARTWORKS. IN THE MUSEUM, ARTWORK ACQUIRES ADDED VALUE. MUSEUMS WITHOUT ARTWORKS ARE LIKE BANKS WITHOUT MONEY. THE ARTISTS HAVE ENTRUSTED THE MUSEUM WITH THEIR BANK CARDS AND THUS HANDED A PART OF THEIR LIVES OVER TO THE MUSEUM, AT LEAST THE PART DIRECTLY RELATED TO THEIR BANK ACCOUNTS. IN THE *Credits* SERIES, TWO INSTITUTIONS OF TRUST ARE THUS PUT ON THE SAME LEVEL: THE BANKS CREATE THE CONDITIONS FOR PRODUCTION, PRODUCE DEBIT AND CREDIT CARDS AND LOOK AFTER THE MONEY DEPOSITED IN THE ACCOUNTS ASSOCIATED WITH THESE CARDS, WHILE THE MUSEUM ENSURES THAT THE PUBLIC HAS ACCESS TO THESE OBJECTS AND, AT THE SAME TIME, THAT THESE OBJECTS REMAIN SAFE AND INTACT. THE ARTWORK CONSISTS NOT IN THE BANK CARDS AS SUCH BUT RATHER IN THE PARALLELISM OF DOUBLE TRUST.

Credits = TRUST IN THE BANK + TRUST IN THE MUSEUM. ^[28]

Wedge between two institutional frameworks and two different value systems the *Credits* series undermines both, while at the same time being indebted to both for its very existence. As Janša, Janša and Janša effectively put it in their notes on collateral art, institutional critique has turned into institutional complicity.

28 Cf. *Credit's* project statement, available at <http://janezjansa.si/credits/index.html>.



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Masterpiece on MasterCard, Credits series, 2013

TROIKA - Credits



I ♥ Germany



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Edvard Kardelj, I ❤️ Germany series, 2013



I ❤️
GERMANY

ARTISTS BECOME VIRUSES, WORKING EMPATHICALLY WITH
THE SUBJECT OF INTERVENTION.
THEY DISRUPT THE MACHINE BY PERFORMING IT. ^[29]

This complicity might look cynical and opportunistic, and can be better understood if contextualized in the recent debate about activism and opposition in the age of accelerated capitalism. In her book *Networked Disruption*, Tatiana Bazzichelli focuses on how strategies developed by hackers and networkers have been co-opted by the companies that are shaping the social web, and explores the double nature of “disruption”. “[...] hackers and artists have been both active agents of business innovation as well as those undermining it”, ^[30] she claims, further explaining:

ARTISTS AND HACKERS USE DISRUPTIVE TECHNIQUES OF
NETWORKING IN THE FRAMEWORK OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEB-
BASED SERVICES TO GENERATE NEW MODALITIES FOR USING
TECHNOLOGY, WHICH, IN SOME CASES, ARE UNPREDICTABLE
AND CRITICAL; BUSINESS ENTERPRISES APPLY DISRUPTION AS A
FORM OF INNOVATION TO CREATE NEW MARKETS AND NETWORK
VALUES, WHICH ARE ALSO OFTEN UNPREDICTABLE. DISRUPTION
THEREFORE BECOMES A TWO-WAY STRATEGY IN NETWORKING
CONTEXTS: A PRACTICE FOR GENERATING CRITICISM AND A
METHODOLOGY FOR CREATING BUSINESS INNOVATION [...] IS IT
STILL MEANINGFUL TO CONSIDER HACKTIVISM AS A RADICAL
CRITICISM OF A SYSTEM, WHEN HACKERS HAVE CONTRIBUTED
TO ITS CREATION AND ITS STRENGTHENING? AND, IF CAPITALISM
AND WHAT WAS ONCE CALLED "COUNTERCULTURE" NOW SHARE
SIMILAR RHETORIC AND STRATEGIES, IS IT POSSIBLE TO IMAGINE
ALTERNATIVES TO THE CURRENT STATE OF CAPITALISM? ^[31]

29 Tatiana Bazzichelli, *Networked Disruption. Rethinking Opposition in Art, Hacktivism and the Business of Social Networking*, Digital Aesthetics Research Center, Aarhus University 2013, p. 12.

30 Ibidem, p. 9.

31 Ibidem, p. 11.

Even if Bazzichelli focuses on an online economy in which open source platforms have forged a brand new way of making money, and the best hackers are hired by Google, her model can easily be applied to the broader economic and political context. In a situation in which linguistic innovations are instantly subsumed by pop culture, guerrilla marketing is the best advertising strategy, artistic provocations are converted into ads, the Pope is using 'promotional' gimmicks in his ^[32] homilies, and politics has to follow the trends set by the likes of Silvio Berlusconi, subversive affirmation runs the risk of becoming largely ineffective in terms of criticism; in this situation, artists and hackers have to envision new strategies of action and communication, where opposition becomes infiltration and rejection makes way for empathy; and theory needs to evolve accordingly, "rethinking cooptation as a process" and reframing dialectics in the context of disruption:



32 As Pope Francis in the Angelus on November 17, 2013: "Now I would like to recommend a medicine to you. Some of you may be wondering: 'Is the Pope a pharmacist now?' It is a special medicine which will help you to benefit from the Year of Faith, as it soon will come to an end. It is a medicine that consists of 59 threaded beads; a 'spiritual medicine' called Misericordin. A small box containing 59 beads on a string. This little box contains the medicine, and will be distributed to you by volunteers as you leave the square. Take them! There is a rosary, with which you can pray the Chaplet of Divine Mercy, spiritual help for our souls and for spreading love, forgiveness and brotherhood everywhere. Do not forget to take it, because it is good for you. It is good for the heart, the soul, and for life in general!" cf. www.news.va/en/news/angelus-17-november-2013.

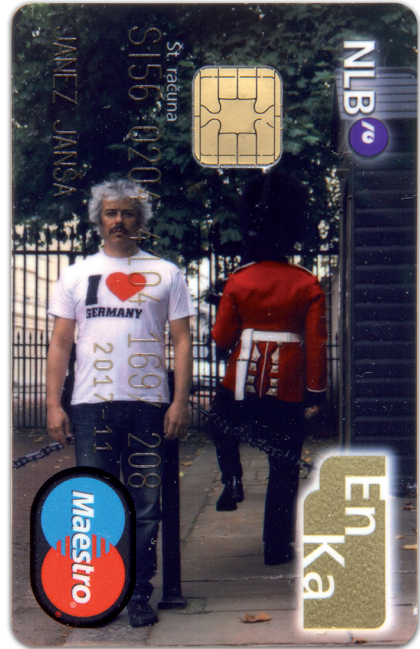


Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Greek guard on Visa,
I ♥ Germany series, Credits series, 2013

SINCE CONTRADICTIONS AND DICHOTOMIES ARE NOWADAYS
INHERENT IN BUSINESS LOGIC, THE CHALLENGE LIES
IN THE EXPLORATION OF SYMBOLIC DISSOLUTIONS
OF POWER, WHERE HACKERS AND ARTISTS DIRECTLY
PERFORM SUCH CONTRADICTIONS AND PROVOKE
UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES AS AN ART FORM [...] CHALLENGING THE MARKET DOES NOT MEAN REFUSING
IT, BUT TRANSFORMING IT INTO A "PLAYGROUND", BOTH
TO APPROPRIATE IT AND EXPOSE ITS INCONGRUITIES [...] THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT OPPOSITIONS DISAPPEAR
COMPLETELY, BUT THAT THEY BECOME MULTIPLE, MUTUAL,
VIRAL AND DISTRIBUTED - AS THE MANY NODES OF
A NETWORK. ^[33]

33 Tatiana Bazzichelli, *Networked Disruption*, p. 11 - 13.

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
*Queen's Guard on Gold Maestro,
 I ♥ Germany series, Credits series, 2013*



For Janša, Janša and Janša, institutional complicity and collaboration with companies thus becomes a powerful way of interfering with the nature and meaning of objects, symbols and power structures, without resigning themselves to working on the level of representation alone, as artists are usually expected to do. The manipulated image of a credit card may be a powerful image; but only by turning a real credit card into the site of their artistic intervention are they able to influence the behaviour and subtly change the regulations of institutions like banks and museums, or at least make them — and us — think about these regulations from a different point of view. Furthermore, the credit card as a support and “medium” for the image enforces the meaning and power of the image itself. Let’s consider, for example, the project *I Love Germany* (2013), a series of photographs picturing Janša, Janša and Janša in different situations wearing an “I ♥ Germany” t-shirt. The series shows how even clichéd signifiers like the “I ♥” trend can acquire unexpected, powerful meaning when juxtaposed



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
I ♥ Roška on Gold Maestro,
I ♥ Germany series, Credits series, 2013

and remixed with other signifiers, and how a similarly clichéd gesture (the tourist portrait) can become a strong political gesture.

While the “I ♥” t-shirt, which started life as a handy tourist gimmick, is now a global phenomenon and a universal signifier that is instantly comprehensible, the “I ♥ Germany” t-shirt is not easy to find. To buy their t-shirts, Janez Janša traveled through Germany, from Berlin to Cologne, eventually locating some in the backroom of a tourist shop in Frankfurt. Germany is the most powerful and influential country in the EU; it is the country of the Bund, the 10-year bond used as a benchmark to calculate and rate the stability of other countries’ economies. Furthermore, Germany is a country that attracts immigrants from all over the world, including young people looking for jobs, low rent, a high standard of living and the opportunity to have children and support them. Although there are many reasons to love it, this love is rarely exhibited. Wearing these t-shirts in different situations, Janša, Janša and Janša make at least three signifiers

interact with each other in the same image: the “ clichéd ” signifier of the “ I ♥ ” t-shirt, applied to a subject (Germany) that is, more often than not, the object of an unspoken, discreet love; the “ hijacked ” signifier of the name Janez Janša, belonging to the leader of the Slovenian Democratic Party as well as the three artists; and the plain signifier of the background, be it related to politics and history (like the monument to Edvard Kardelj in Republic Square, Ljubljana or the building where the trial against Janez Janša was held in 1988),^[34] or local and global economics (the Greek soldier and the “ I ♥ Sales ” sign), and the uncertain political identity of the European Union (the British guard, Angela Merkel’s propaganda). Using the oblique strategies (neither critical nor affirmative) that are part of their signature style, Janša, Janša and Janša ask some uncomfortable questions: how do you position yourself as an active subject in the globalized world? How do you reconcile tradition and consumerism, being a global tourist and a victim of the financial crisis? And finally: what do you love? Although some of these images have been shown as photographic prints on paper^[35] and a few of them circulated on media, they all ended up on credit cards^[36]. We could even claim that the entire project was developed with *Credits* in mind. These simple, immediate images fit the philosophy of credit card customization almost perfectly, and would be equally suitable as the cover of a Facebook profile: their bearers display what they love, and ultimately who they are. At the same time, the exploration of the importance of economics in shaping the European identity, and challenging it (think about the picture shot in Athens), which underlies all of the shots, is driven home forcefully by the medium of the credit card.

34 One of the works in the series shows Janša, Janša and Janša in front of a poster saying “ I ♥ Roška ”. The poster advertises the High School of Economics, currently located in the building where, in 1988, the trial against Janez Janša and three other citizens was held in front of the military court of the Yugoslav People’s Army. The building was built by the Austrians for their army, and was later used by soldiers of the Yugoslav People’s Army. The street was christened “ Roška cesta ” in 1952. Before that it was known as “ Domobranska cesta ” — a name with other historical implications, since “ domobrani ” was the name for Nazi collaborators in Slovenia.

35 In the solo exhibition *Auction* (Aksioma Project Space, Ljubljana, October 23 - November 22, 2013. Cf. www.aksioma.org/i.love.germany/index.html).

36 Shown in the group exhibition *I am another world | Artistic Authorship between Desubjectivization and Recanonization* (Academy of Fine Arts, Vienna, November 21, 2013 - January 12, 2014).





Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
I ♥ Sales on Gold Maestro,
I ♥ Germany series, Credits series, 2013

Conclusions

[...] LIFE TURNS LIVING SITUATIONS INTO WORK. IN THAT
SENSE, LIFE BECOMES WORK [...] WE SEE THE WORKS
PRODUCED AS PRODUCT OF CIRCUMSTANCES ^[37]

When they changed their names, Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša set up a situation that allows them to blur the dividing line between art and life to the point of no return. Since then their art has been a consequence of their attempts to live their own lives as simply as possible. As they pointed out in the title of a recent exhibition ^[38], there are no longer “works” of art, just “work”: a continuum that is sometimes generated by companies and institutions as a reaction to their lives, and sometimes by isolating and documenting specific episodes in their lives. A continuum that exists because their name is Janez Janša.

→
Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Signature (Kunsthaus Graz) on Gold MasterCard, Credit series, 2013

37 Janez Janša, Personal communication, November 20, 2013.

38 The solo exhibition *Work*, MMSU - Mali salon, Rijeka, November 14 - December 4, 2013.



Photo credits

pp. 9, 19, 22-23, 28-29, 35, 43, 48-49

Photo: Janez Janša

pp. 14-15

Photo: Nada Žgank/Memento

p. 32

Photo: Željko Stevanić

pp. 64-65

Photo: Myriam Détruy

All photos courtesy Aksioma

except for:

p. 30

OHO, *Mount Triglav*

Courtesy: Moderna galerija, Ljubljana

Exhibition credits

pp. 22-23

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša

Work, curated by Ksenija Orelj, Sabina Salamon, Mali salon / MMSU, Rijeka, 2013

Part of the project *Smuggling Anthologies*

pp. 28-29

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša

Troika, part of *Dear Art*, curated by What, How & for Whom/WHW,

Calvert 22 Gallery, London, 2013

pp. 48-49

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša

Credits, part of *Stopover 1:1*, curated by Zdenka Badovinac, MSUM, Ljubljana, 2013

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Clouds

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Mathias Jansson, *Everything I shoot Is Art*, 2012

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Damiano Nava, *Let the Right One In*, 2013

Catalogues

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In summer 2007 three artists from Slovenia legally changed their names to Janez Janša. This life event heralded a break in their artistic practice, which evolved into one of the most radical explorations of life in the age of biopolitics. Featuring a text by Domenico Quaranta, this book documents and discusses their recent work, a continuum that is generated both by companies and institutions as a reaction to their life events, and by isolating and documenting specific episodes in their lives. The artists use ID cards, passports and bank cards to challenge the very concepts of “art” and “artwork”. Their practice takes on the financial and bureaucratic systems that endeavour to regulate our lives, and undermines the art establishment’s attempt to determine and safeguard the value of artworks, while actively seeking the complicity of both sets of institutions.

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