

A Self-Versioning Surrogate

Luciana Janaqui pushes herself away, to the utmost. She distances, observes, and assesses herself. For Janaqui, bodily features such as sex, age, physiognomy, form; mental tendencies such as temperament, sensibility, tastes, habits; and social indicators such as name, birth, family, nationality are mere specs, set in that particular combination on the body as a vessel—or device—that just so happened to be assigned to her. Most people perceive these variables in themselves at uniformly low resolution, because the viscous medium called self-perception clings to them and blocks the view. She, however, accepts each item as a blunt number, parsing it matter-of-factly and arranging it with orderly indifference. And then she installs and reinstalls into the enclosure that is her own body new memories, experiences, actions, thinking circuits, and narratives, and rewrites them where appropriate—at times while connecting to external memory devices or cloud-based data storage, so to speak, that all humans share. Or else she observes how modifications to her external specs alter her internal specs, how revisions to attributive specs affect the ecology of self and other—at times employing compression, decompression, and literal ‘Save As’ with a new name. In this way Janaqui keeps updating—or, borrowing her own wording, ‘versioning’—herself, continually postponing the fixing of her states and detouring identification. This attitude is consistent, through and through: whether she enjoys a solo backpacking trip while successively ‘taking over’ the personalities of people she meets and ‘riding off’ from them (searching for the search for self, 2013–); whether she offers herself on subscription as an animate doll that a paying user can dress up at will (Sales Contract for the Right to Control the Appearance of Luciana Janaqui, 2016–); whether she naturally re-performs, day by day, over the course of a month walking the Camino de Santiago, various events reported by past pilgrims in their blogs, as if using her body as a stand-in vessel, and records in a diary both repetitions and deviations by copy-pasting and handwriting, respectively (mi EL Camino, 2018); whether she synchronises her lips, relentlessly, to audio recordings of the female assistants who, on the spot, were translating into Japanese the words of male cosmetic surgeons she visited abroad, and then uses a ‘beauty-enhancing’ smartphone app to implement the surgeons’ recommended changes on her own face as it appears in the video that records her lip-syncing (counseling reflection, 2020); whether she takes the emblematic image obtained by matching her birthday to the ancient Maya calendar and turns it into a sculptural self-portrait with slight alterations (no’j-1-4.5.1987, 2021); or whether she lends herself out for pay as a babysitter, petsitter, or housekeeper (2020–). As the last example suggests, her undertakings to date have, when optimised as labour in the social dimension, often taken the form of stand-in work. I’ll (really) keep my fingers crossed *But it costs a bit, the activity Janaqui initiated the other day, develops this into a substitute prayer service, open to an unspecified multitude. Behind this is her keen insight into civilisation, culture, and custom as forms of collective memory: something that, while propagating through the unbroken chain of vast time and the far-flung spread of space, is incessantly updated through transformation and derivation.