

I am Janez Janša!

An exclusive insight into the documentary that has stirred up Slovenia without anyone having even seen it

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Dražen Dragojević holding a photo with Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša at the SDS headquarter.
Photo: Miha Fras

A while ago, we were suddenly told that our Prime Minister Janez Janša appeared in a porn movie. Or more accurately, that the documentary *My Name Is Janez Janša*, made by the multimedia artist Janez Janša, situated our Prime Minister in a pornographic context, which might be offensive, defamatory, abusive and so forth. The Prime Minister and we, the pleasantly alarmed Slovenian public, were given the news by Gregor Pajič, the horrified director of the state-owned Viba, who stated that he felt

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obliged to report such matters, for it is forbidden to use state money to fund pornographic films or films with pornographic content. This, of course, is so relative that the outburst of moral panic and patriotic hysteria, together with Pajić's "report", was not only nonsensical and unnecessary, but also amateurish, grotesque and absurd – even more so if we consider the fact that state money has been used in Slovenia to make films with pornographic scenes, in socialism (*The Outlaw/Odpadnik*, Šprajc) as well as in capitalism (*Suburbia/Predmestje*, Möderndorfer). It was absurd that Pajić reported this in the first place, and it was even more absurd that the report was made by someone who has not even seen the film, who has only heard about something that allegedly goes on in the film.

After you have finally seen the documentary *My Name Is Janez Janša*, the whole thing will seem even more absurd. After having seen it myself, I can only say this: I have no doubts that there are sturdy, snubbed, patriotic fellas who are just dying to see a porn flick featuring Janez Janša (perhaps in the role of a masked, leather-clad dominator sporting a whip), but for now they will just have to make do with their own unfulfilled fantasies. Namely, the much maligned and inflated "porn scene" only lasts a *second* (if you are in the habit of blinking during screenings, you may well miss it) and it is taken out of Bruce LaBruce's cult film – and, of course, it has nothing to do with Janez Janša. It is only related to Vaginal Davis, the American transvestite performer, who appeared in LaBruce's film, who has collaborated with Janez Janša before – for instance, in the project *Visions of Excess*, which *Mladina* in 2004 proclaimed "the party of the decade" – and who also appears in Janša's doco, as one of the many interviewees. Instead of introducing Vaginal Davis in a protracted manner, Janez Janša simply shows a brief scene from LaBruce's film – and everything is clear. A single image says more than a thousand words.

It is, however, even more absurd – if this is even possible! – that Pajić reported, as something illegal, something that is actually superb, lucid, funny, erudite, globally competitive and, given the situation in Slovenia, way above average, not to say unique. *My Name Is Janez Janša* is a fine mixture of documentary, biography, essay, study and travelogue with a lively sense of irony and self-irony. But then again, we could expect nothing less from Janez Janša – one of the three artists that officially changed their names to Janez Janša a few years ago. Considering his opus, it was highly unlikely that Janez Janša would produce something cheap, narrow-minded, obtuse, half-baked, ill-considered, simplistic, offensive, or even pornographic. In a country, whose film production is, for the most part, so bad that it does indeed look illegal, it is really nice to see a film that is so good that it seems illegal.

I am Spartacus!

But do not let this mislead you. Actually, the situation is much worse. After Janez Janša has seen this documentary, he will wish to be in a porn movie. He will wish to be in a hundred porn movies. For the documentary *My Name Is Janez Janša* is worse than pornography; namely, it is a plan of how to get rid of Janez Janša – peacefully, without violence, without the adage “*discredit first, then liquidate*”. No, this is not an act of discrediting Janez Janša; rather, it is an act of glorifying him. This is not a story about how to get rid of Janez Janša by discrediting him, but rather how to get rid of him through glorification – through mantric repetition of his name (“*I am Janez Janša, I am Janez Janša, I am Janez Janša*”), his ideology (those who are not Janez Janša do not belong) and his slogan “*The more of us there are, the faster we can achieve our goal*”.

In the beginning was the word, and the word was a name. However, since this is a story about three artists who changed their names (into Janez Janša), it starts with a man who changed his name. Dražen Dragojević, the *master of ceremony* in this documentary, receives an email signed by Robert Rich. Those who know a little bit about the history of Hollywood would know that Robert Rich was the pseudonym of Hollywood screenwriter Dalton Trumbo, former communist, who was blacklisted during the period of Cold-War anti-communist hysteria, McCarthyism and the notorious House Un-American Activities Committee, so he was forced to use pseudonyms – and one of them was Robert Rich. He was even awarded an oscar under this pseudonym! If Trumbo wanted to work, if he wanted to make a living, he had to assume another name. Which brings us to the question: Does one have to change one’s name to Janez Janša to be able to survive in Slovenia? Does one have to become Janez Janša to be able to work? To be even able to get some work?

Well, Robert Rich sends a link to Dragojević saying, “*Have a look at this! It seems to me this might be of interest for your documentary on names.*” And YouTube shows the finale of Kubrick’s *Spartacus*, in which, after the battle, the rebellious slaves are called to identify the (dead or alive) slave called Spartacus. If they do identify him, they will not be crucified. Spartacus, played by Kirk Douglas, does not want the Roman soldiers to crucify all slaves, so he stands up and says, “I am Spartacus!” But, at the exact same time, somebody else stands up and says, “I am Spartacus!” The slaves rise one after another repeating, “*I am Spartacus! I am Spartacus! I am Spartacus!*” They all change their names to Spartacus. And in the end, they are all crucified. This, of course, anticipates – and apocalyptically perverts – Janša’s slogan “*The more of us there are, the faster we can achieve our goal*”.

The role and the function of name are explored and discussed by artists from all over the world – Hoo Kuan Cien, Anders Jiras, Nelisiwe Xaba, Tith Kanitha, Mohammad Hidayat, Eva Mattes, Tim Etchells, Hans Bernhard, Vaginal Davis – and also by psychologist Vid Vodušek, professor of law Miro Cerar, philosopher Mladen Dolar, poet Miroslav Košuta, journalist Jela Krečič, art theorist Miško Šuvaković, Italian sociologist Antonio Caronia, Canadian professor Catherine M. Soussloff, and so on. Some people are happy with their name; others are not. Some are bothered by it; others are not. Some would like to change it; some others have already done so. Some people like the sound of their name; others only like its original spelling, say in Chinese characters; yet others feel their name sounds like a cartoon character. But one's name is one's right and one's duty, says Cerar. And of course, personal name is not only personal property; it is also the property of society; it enables the individual to acquire social security, the right to health services and similar things, while it enables the society to punish the individual, says Caronia. Cemeteries are full of names that used to think they were irreplaceable and unchangeable.

Heil Schicklgruber!

The problem arises, of course, when a namesake appears – somebody with the same first name and the same last name as you. The predicament is obvious. And so is the uncanniness. To be sure, you can keep saying to yourself, “*my name is not my identity*”, but this hardly changes anything. What you are (or what you think you are) is no special achievement anyway. Only the change of one's name leads to an achievement. Artist Kristin Sue Lucas officially changed her name from Kristin Sue Lucas to Kristin Sue Lucas – she changed her name into the exact same name. She refreshed it – like one refreshes a web page. This is another reason why Vaginal Davis and the Mattes couple keep changing their names all the time. And this is another reason, according to Dolar, why revolutionaries change their names – Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov became Lenin, Lev Davidovich Bronshtein became Trotsky, Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili became Stalin, and Josip Broz became Tito.

You cannot change the world if your name is Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov or Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili. Lenin or Stalin sounds better, more forceful, more active. Would Bill Clinton have become the president of the USA if he had kept his original name William Jefferson Blythe? Would Rasputin and Caligula have gotten as far as they had if they had kept their original names, Grigori Yefimovich Novik and Gaius Julius Caesar respectively? Would Muhammad Ali have achieved everything that he had if he had remained

Cassius Clay? Would Pol Pot have succeeded in sending Cambodia back to year zero if he had remained Saloth Sar? Would a Chinese businessman be as successful as he is if one of the characters in his name signified “loss” or “failure”? And finally, would Hitler have become Hitler, Dolar wonders, if Hitler’s father Alois had not changed the family name Schicklgruber into Hitler? Would he have had such a sadistic relation to the nation if his last name had been Schicklgruber? Surely, exclaiming *Heil Schicklgruber!* would not have had the same effect as *Heil Hitler!* But then again, even Janez Janša – yep, Primer Minister Janez Janša – has changed his name, according to Ilinka Todorovski; would he have gotten this far if he had kept his original name, Ivan Janša? Could he have done to the nation what he is doing to his wife if he had remained Ivan Janša? Janez Janša sounds more harmonious, more pleasant, more folksy, more Pan-Slovenian, more seductive – it slips into Slovenian hearts more easily. Anyhow, the wisest thing to do is to change one’s name. You cannot change the world if you do not change your name. My name is a contract between myself and the society, says Caronia; you cannot change the society if you do not break this contract. The artists who changed their names to Janez Janša have done precisely this.

Oh yes, what happens if somebody appears who has the exact same first name and the exact same last name as you? Etchells says that namesakes irritate him. But that is the least. What if your namesake is a communist? What if he is a criminal? Or a terrorist? What if he is an artist? And what if he was born on the same day and in the same year as you? Of course, this can be useful; for instance, he might be enlisted instead of you. However, namesakes can also be “*a pretty serious problem, a problem that can derail the whole system*”, says the master of ceremony. “*Imagine that you live in a place where thousands of other people – every single one of them – have the same name as you. You would vanish. You would become Mr Nobody. You would prefer to leave this place – or change your name.*”

The more of us there are, the faster we can achieve our goal!

When the three artists changed their names to Janez Janša, they intervened into the name of Janez Janša, the president of the SDS (Slovenian Democratic Party/Slovenska demokratska stranka) and the Prime Minister of Slovenia. Is this a problem? Not really, for actually it is precisely Janez Janša who expects and demands from Slovenian people to become Janez Janšas. Namely, his slogan reads: “*The more of us there are, the faster we can achieve our goal!*” Janez Janša appeals to Slovenians to change their names to Janez Janša. Logically, the more of us there are, the faster we can achieve our goal! And so “*the multiplication of Janez*

Janša” began. Some people had the impression that this name was spreading like a disease, an epidemic, a virus, while others exhaled in panic: “*I hope we do not all become Janez Janšas.*” Which was merely a prophecy that fulfilled itself; you can no longer kiss Emil Hrvatin, Žiga Kariž in Davide Grassi – you can only kiss the cheek, the forehead or the lips of Janez Janša, argues Miško Šuvaković.

Is this pornographic? Perhaps. But this is irrelevant. What is relevant, though, is far worse than pornography. And what is worse than pornography is bad news for Prime Minister Janez Janša. What have the three new Janez Janšas accomplished by multiplying the name Janez Janša? Prime Minister Janez Janša is now nothing more than a Campbell soup can in Andy Warhol’s work, argues Zdenka Badovinac, the director of the Museum of Modern Art (Moderna galerija). Even worse, the multiplication of the name Janez Janša leads into “*the loss of referent*”, “*the disappearance of the subject*” – the disappearance of that original Janez Janša, Prime Minister Janez Janša, whose name has been assumed by three artists. The more of us there are, the faster we can achieve our goal – the more of Janez Janšas there are, the sooner Janez Janša will disappear. The goal of Janez Janšas is the ultimate *money shot* – the disappearance of Janez Janša. Erasure. Even if it is self-erasure. Or, as Mladen Dolar argues, “*since there are now four Janez Janšas, no Janez Janša can simply keep inhabiting his name and being himself*”. Least of all the initial, the original Janez Janša.

Even worse, according to Antonio Caronia, the three new Janez Janšas are more entitled to the name Janez Janša than the initial Janez Janša. And not without reason; the three Janez Janšas have worked very hard to become Janez Janša – they became members of the SDS, they attended their meetings, congresses, picnics and sports events, they celebrated the name and the figure of Janez Janša, they changed all their documents, they climbed Triglav, they kept repeating the mantra “*I am Janez Janša*”. Chop, chop, chop! Come on, SDS, come on! Janez Janša, the author of the documentary *My Name Is Janez Janša*, even got married as Janez Janša – and his best man was Janez Janša, and his wife’s witness was Janez Janša. They were not “*just simulating the name Janez Janša, they were actually and legally using it*”, says philosopher Lev Kreft – they staked, sacrificed or at least risked their own lives. And all of a sudden, they *became* Janez Janšas.

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When a politician comes into power, it is up to him to what extent he will interfere with people's lives. Some politicians decide to interfere less, some decide to interfere more, and some decide to interfere a lot. Janez Janša has decided to interfere a lot. And the three artists who changed their names to Janez Janša have decided to interfere with his life. The more of them there are, the sooner they will achieve their goal. And their goal is to bring Janez Janša to the point where he has only two options left – to leave or to change his name.

My Name Is Janez Janša – a documentary about a silent, slow, peaceful, permanent revolution – is cheerful, lively and optimistic; hence, it ends with a *happy end*.

Translated by Polona Petek