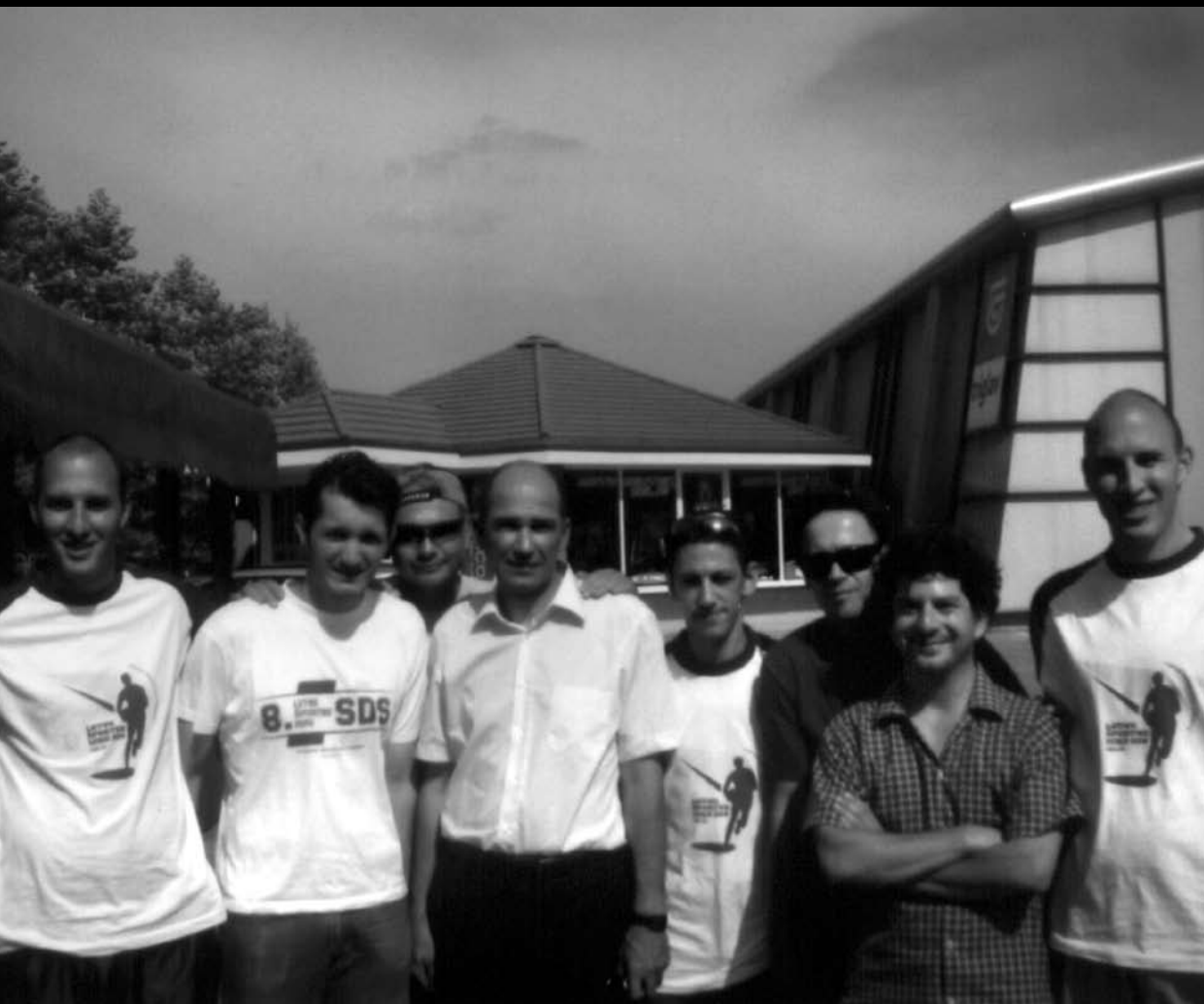# Amelia Jones

Naming Power and the Power of the Name:
Janez Janša Performs the Political in/for the Art World

Janez Janša (prime minister, 4th form the left),
Janez Janša (6th from the left) and Janez Janša
(7th from the left) at the 9th Summer Sport
Games of the Slovene Democratic Party,
Celje, 2007
Photo: Janez Janša

Naming/Knowing

In the summer of 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 (Slovene Democratic Party). In doing so, the three artists made use of the power of the name to construct the subject as a source of agency. The three artists took proper bureaucratic measures to make this name change legally binding and they also became members of the SDS.[1] The artists have also proclaimed that this series of actions surrounding their mutual change of names was not a work of art.

There are now a number of Janez Janšas in Slovenia, three of whom are enacting events in unlikely contexts (including one of them getting married in a public ceremony in August with the other two acting as best men) and causing trouble for the Prime Minister, who is also so identified by this name. At the same time, those of us in the art world who might want to write about the work of, say, the artist formerly known as Hrvatin, no longer know who is who in this triumvirate's strange interventions—and how to refer to them, except perhaps (as I will here) as the collective "JJJ project."

When I was growing up in a small city in North Carolina, my family and the children at school called me "Amy." This was what my mother originally wanted to name me (our family name being "Jones," which was then one of the two most common names in the USA), but veered away from this choice when the naming dictionary she consulted during her pregnancy in 1961 stated that Amy was a diminutive for "Amelia." Being the rule-following sort, she and my father duly named me Amelia – and then proceeded to call me Amy. I knew this story, and from as far back as I can remember I questioned my parents' bizarre insistence on following the rules only to break them.

As I grew up, I began to rethink my name (and thus, inevitably, to rethink myself). I was tired of people assuming I was joking when I told them my name ("Amy Jones" sounded like the most common name possible, something like "Juan López" in Mexico or "John Smith" in England); and I was also tired of learning that in my new environs, the North East of the USA, "Amy's" were usually blond athletes, an image that didn't suit me at all. I decided that, as a professional scholar, I would be better off reverting to my "real" name: Amelia Jones. The day I arrived at graduate school at the age of 24, I began to identify myself by this, my given name.

So Amelia Jones is what I began as. And it is what I have been compelled to return to. It is what I have had to become. Amelia Jones enacts me as a scholar, an art historian, one who is serious rather than ("Amy

[1] According to most sources, the SDS has moved increasingly to the right since gaining power in the early 21st century; see the party's website http://eng.sds.si/ for descriptions of their platform.

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
*70434566 (Slovenian Democratic
Party Membership Card),*
Ljubljana, 2007
Print on plastic, 5,4 x 8,5cm
Courtesy: Aksioma
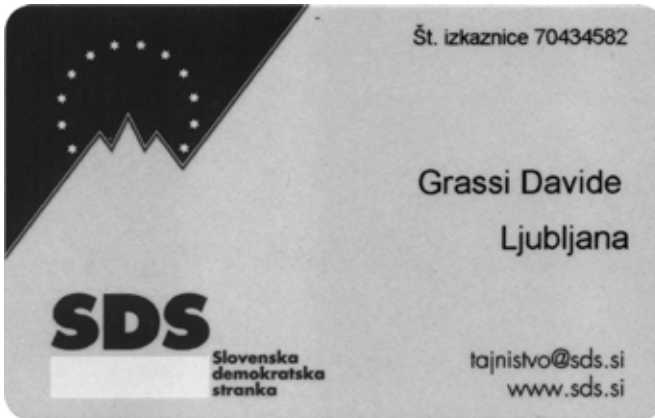
Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
*70434582 (Slovenian Democratic
Party Membership Card),*
Ljubljana, 2007
Print on plastic, 5,4 x 8,5cm
Courtesy: Aksioma
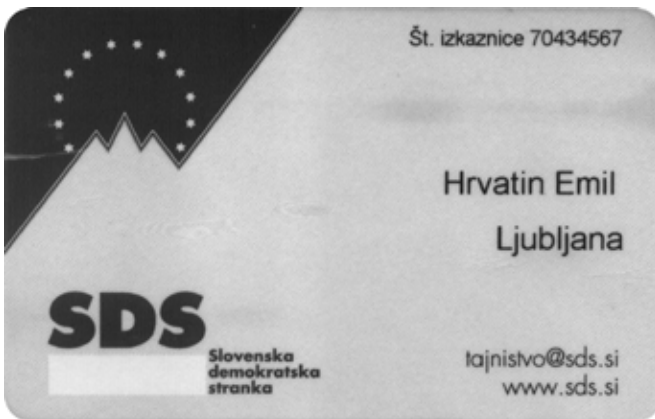
Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
*70434567 (Slovenian Democratic
Party Membership Card),*
Ljubljana, 2007
Print on plastic, 5,4 x 8,5cm
Courtesy: Aksioma

Jones") banal. This act of self-re-nomination reminded me of the power of the name not only as a way to lay claim to acts and expressions but also to enact a particular kind of subject.

Naming and Nationhood

Right around the time I was going through this minor upheaval in my self-naming (c. 1985), Yugoslavia was in the throes of renaming itself – a renaming that was intimately linked with the shattering of political formations and the redrawing (sometimes to gruesomely bloody effect) of "national" boundaries. Marshal Tito, its illustrious leader, had decentralized the government of the state into an eight-man presidency by the mid 1970s, and yet still ran Yugoslavia as a dictatorship until his death in 1980 after 35 years of ruling the country. With the dissolution of the USSR in the late 1980s, Yugoslavia also disintegrated; this disintegration was galvanized, in part, by political interventions on the part of a group of leftist youth writing in the journal *Mladina*, and this group included a young firebrand named Ivan Janša, who was arrested along with three colleagues (the "Ljubljana Four") in 1988 for his activities.[2] As Janša rather breathlessly describes his (and his colleagues') heroic resistance:

> The arrest came as a huge shock for me. Even though I had been aware for a long time that the (then) authorities viewed with displeasure our political activities and initiatives for a new Constitution, freedom of speech and expression, … our criticism of the YNA [Yugoslav People's Army, the Communist military] and the League of Communists and, in the months before the arrest, our open support of the multi-party system, neither my friends nor I expected such a sharp reaction.[3]

Janša's expression of shock at being arrested – despite obviously being familiar with the tactics of totalitarian regimes and also well aware of the dangerous shifting tides of power in Yugoslavia at the time (even given the relative moderation of the leadership of Milan Kučan)[4] – reads as a calculated strategy for performing himself as a hero. Janez Janša – the name by which he would be known by in the public arena – performed the hero first as defense minister in Lojze Peterle's government, then as the leading member of the centre-right Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), and then, from 2004 to the present, as Prime Minister of Slovenia. Janša, in his transition from Ivan to Janez, from radical young activist to right-wing leader, performs – *signs* – himself via the name as the embodiment of the newly "democratic" nation of Slovenia.[5] In a sense, Janez Janša "is" contemporary Slovenia – or would, at least, like to be seen as such. As cited above, his autobiography, *The Making of the Slovenian State 1988-1992: The Collapse of Yugoslavia*, which

[2] The brief background I sketch here is embarrassingly over-simplified but necessary for "Euro-American" readers as I define this loose cultural concept here. My sources for this history are primarily Janez Janša, *The Making of the Slovenian State 1988-1992: The Collapse of Yugoslavia* (1992; reprint Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2007); and Laura Silber and Allan Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia* (London: Penguin Books and BBC Books, 1995).

[3] Janša, *The Making of the Slovenian State*, p. 17.

[4] In the late 1980s, Kučan was the leader of the Communist Party, and was nominally responsible for arresting Janša. Kučan became the first president of independent Slovenia in the early 1990s, with Lojze Peterle as Prime Minister. Janša served as defense minister in Peterle's cabinet.

[5] While favouring some liberal social policies such as same-sex civil unions, the SDS is pro-business and follows the Reaganite policy of devolving power to local governments, reducing funding for federal social programs. From the point of view of an American, Slovenia perfectly exemplifies the corruption of the notion of "democracy" in US-inspired (or US-forced, as in Iraq) initiatives around the globe.

poses as a history of modern Slovenia via his own diary entries and descriptions (thus, to some extent, collapsing Slovenia into Janez Janša), makes this much clear. As Janša retells the history of contemporary Slovenia as the history of his heroic participation in the events resulting in the overthrow of the former Yugoslavia and the repulsion of Serbian aggression, His project raises the question of how histories are written, and how they – seemingly inevitably – get attached to "great names" (usually those of

TRIGLAV, NAŠ MOST

kulturna prireditev v Triglavsken domu na Kredarici
v soboto, 4. avgusta 2007, ob cca 20.30

ob
80. obletnici smrti Jakoba Aljaža,
33. obletnici Pešpoti z Vrhnike na Triglav,
5. obletnici Pešpoti z Vrbskega jezera preko Triglava do
Bohinjskega jezera,
25. obletnici izhajanja Nove revije in
20. obletnici 57. številke Nove revije, temeljne
publikacije SLOVENSKE POMLADI in
16. obletnici slovenske države.

Sodelovali bodo:

Pevci Bratje Smrtnik z avstrijske Koroške
Mili Hrovat, koroška pesnica
Logaški oktet
Jernej Kuntner, igralec
Tone Kuntner, igralec in pesnik
Tomaž Plahutnik, citrar
Marko Kobal, operni pevec
Kulturno – umetniško društvo Stara Vrhnika

DOM PLANIKA
POD TRIGLAVOM
2408 m

Program of the commemoration of the 80th anniversary of the death of Jakob Aljaž; the 33rd anniversary of the Footpath from Vrhnika to Mount Triglav; the 5th anniversary of the Footpath from the Wörthersee Lake across Mount Triglav to the Bohinj Lake; the 25th anniversary of the publication of *Nova revija* magazine and the 20th anniversary of the 57th issue of *Nova revija*, the premiere publication of the SLOVENIAN SPRING; and the 16th anniversary of the independent state of Slovenia,
Dom Planika, 2007

men who have access to the public visibility and agency that allows them to determine shifts in national or international affairs and then to ensure the documentation of these shifts in history).

Paralleling Prime Minister Janša's hijacking of history, the JJJ project adopts the name of power to retrieve a particular history of Slovenian contemporary art. In their 2007 *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* work, for example, the three artists reenacted a famous 1968 happening that was originally performed by the Slovenian OHO group (Milenko Matanović, David Nez, Drago Dellabernardina) in the main square of Ljubljana and had already been recreated in 2004 by the internationally-known Slovenian artists' collective Irwin, as part of their 2003-4 project *Like to Like*.[6] As Miško Šuvaković notes in this volume, all three of these "Mount Triglav" projects "are the most radical executions of the *politically sliding sign*, that is, individual explanations of symptoms of Slovene identity and, more importantly, the historical construction and reconstruction of political identities."[7] From the OHO project onward, the works are acts of *naming* that are at once individual (three men pose as "Mount Triglav", the mountain that looks like three heads or "*tri glav[e]*" and is associated with the history and culture of Slovenia), collective (artists working as a team), and "national" (performing themselves in relation to symbols designating nationhood via an identification with the Slovenian landscape).

As previously noted, Šuvaković suggests that the national is a construct comprised of "politically sliding signs", and with each of the three enactments of "Mount Triglav", this sliding sign means something different. OHO performed their piece during a period in which Western Europe was in political turmoil, with students rising up in socialist revolutions. In the midst of this, OHO posed in a central square in Ljubljana as a traditional Slovenian monument, paradoxically literalizing a crucial signifier of "national" identity during a time in which Slovenia was not considered a political entity in its own right. Long after the official constitution of Slovenia as an independent nation but also after the idealism of the break from Yugoslavia had dissipated with the move of figures such as (Prime Minister) Janša to the right, the Irwin collective borrowed and reconstituted past works in order to put them into new contexts.[8] In their "Like to Like" series they reconstituted the earlier actions and projects of OHO in various landscapes and exhibited aestheticized framed photographs of the actions, thus exacerbating the tension between the ephemeral politicized act and the fetish – the document that comes to stand in for it and that can become a commodity on the art market. Šuvaković points out that Irwin deliberately turned OHO's conceptual performance into a fetish, commenting on the fetish status of the mountain itself as a sign of "national" identity.[9]

The JJJ project intervenes in this history at a new moment (or perhaps they have created a new moment as they play out new relations

[6] Notably, the original OHO group members were of different nationalities; the same holds for the three artists who have renamed themselves Janez Janša (who are of Croatian, Italian, and Slovene origin). See "Irwin: Like to Like," on the NSK website for the complex way in which Irwin's project references OHO's practice but also their own past work: http://www.nskstate.com/irwin/works-projects/liketolike.php; accessed 22nd June 2008.

[7] Šuvaković, "3 x Triglav: Controversies and Problems regarding Mount Triglav", see in this volume, pp. 67-74.

[8] Irwin describes their basic working method as the "Retro-Principle," which involves recombining elements from fine art and mass produced images; see "Irwin: Like to Like."

[9] Šuvaković, "3 x Triglav, pp. 67-74."

among the individual, the collective, and the state or between the nation and its symbols). The JJJ project engages past Slovenian works that had already intervened in these relations, and in so doing produces a new thing: an art-historical staging of nationhood as a lineage of past works leading to the present-day Slovenia. Posing "as" the mountain at the mountain itself – staging themselves in a way that informed Slovenes would understand is connected to the earlier art histories of OHO and Irwin – the JJJ project also produces a glossy photograph that reads as an artwork but also as tourist photo or (aside from the absurdity of the three men standing with their heads poking out from under a large piece of dark fabric) as part of an advertising brochure for Slovenian holiday pleasures. The JJJ project's *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* marks the slippage between the symbolic and the "real": the mountain itself has no significance; it has to be *transformed into culture,* through an act of appropriation, in order to signify the Slovene nation.

It is through the exploring and working through of such signs, both proper names and other labels, that identities (from individual to collective to national) are enacted as *identifications*. Rather than "illustrating" the Slovenian nation by claiming its coherence in relation to one's own heroism (as Janez Janša does in his autobiography), the JJJ project presents Slovenia as a shifting ideological nexus taking shape through a process of encouraging individuals to identify with a network of ideas, visual and textual codes that are neither true nor false but, instead, cumulatively enact what the country now comes to mean for its inhabitants and others looking at it from the outside. Rather than disavowing their role in this (art) history of sign/nation-making, this history of producing Slovenia as a nation tied to

the image of its most recognizable natural landmark, the JJJ project embraces it, but in so doing it also opens up gaps in this process of nation formation, gaps in how the sign ("Slovenia" or "Mount Triglav") functions. If the OHO happening indicated a hope for political change, and the Irwin project was a nod to the failure of such past idealisms (after all, they blatantly appropriate a political act and make it into a commodifiable fetish or work of art), then the JJJ project marks the performative process of *naming* as central to the way in which political, cultural, and social identifications take place. As such, a name – such as Janez Janša – can potentially be shifted to new arenas of signification.

After all, it is "Janez Janša" (times 3) who produces this glorious image of Slovenia's entry into political history – as a legitimate state and a member of the European Union since 2004. Perhaps the irony that they are darkly pointing to is that it was precisely upon entry into the E.U. (the supposed front of democracy and liberal social policies) that Janša took over and turned the SDS party to the right.

The Law of Naming

Art historian Molly Nesbit has noted that in 1957 (just before this sequence of affairs in the naming of Amelia Jones occurred, and at the height of the Cold War in which Yugoslavia was only tangentially implicated since Tito wisely kept independent of the USSR), a law was passed in France securing a broad concept of legal authorship pivoting around the name as guarantor of the ownership of "work of the mind," including books and art works. As this law of 11 March 1957 states, the author was to enjoy the right of protection "with respect to his name, his quality, and his work. This right is attached to

[10] *Loi 11 Mars 1957*, as cited (and translated) by Molly Nesbit, "What Was an Author?," *Yale French Studies* 73 (1988), 238.

his person."[10] Within copyright law, the name is the person; (just as, within art discourse, the artist, known via his name, is conflated with his art work: "I just bought a Jackson Pollock!").

As the groundbreaking study of French copyright law by Bernard Edelman makes clear, the 1957 law marked authorship, via the name, in terms of capital; the subject of making – the "person" who makes the work and has the "right" to it, or rather the right to make money from it – is indicated in a legal sense via a name which functions, more or less, as a sign of copyright or effectively, I would argue, as a logo.[11] In Euro-American culture (roughly speaking, the culture of Western Europe and its inheriting dominant cultures in North America), the name is a guarantor, pointing to a person or an agent who made something, but it is a completely unreliable one, as the brief anecdote of my own naming "problem" indicates.[12]

[11] See Edelman's important 1973 book *Le droit saisi par la photographie*, translated into English in 1979 as *Ownership of the Image: Elements for a Marxist Theory of Law, tr. Barbara Kingdom* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul).

[12] While my original family and very old friends still call me "Amy," I answer to it only because I know intellectually they are talking to me—not because Amy indicates in any way who I feel myself to be.

The name is not a final indicator, then, but a process through which we make ourselves into what we believe ourselves to be; or else the name indicates how we want to be known, as in the multiple cases of Janez Janša . The legal name is given copyright status in order to refer what is said (or written or created) back to a subject; in this case the name refers back to the "origin" of the "democratic" Slovenian state. In Euro-American culture, the name functions as part of the process Martin Heidegger identified as characteristic of the modern age, whereby "man becomes subject" by producing the world "as a picture." The modern age (clearly European in Heidegger's own world picture) is thus characterized by the development of the notion of the subject as being in a particular position in relation to things, the world, knowledge: "Man makes depend upon himself the way in which he must take his stand in relation to whatever is as the objective. There begins that way of being human which… [means] the realm of human capability as a domain given over to measuring and executing, for the purpose of gaining mastery over that which is as a whole."[13] The legal name is a word that indicates – in a limited, over-determined, and yet never fully-fixed way – that the person so labeled is an origin (of his own locution, usually; in the case of Janez Janša the Prime Minister, of an entire nation) and that the person is at the apex of a (particular) world picture.

[13] Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" (1938), in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 128, 132.

The name is also marked, conditioned by the vicissitudes of the beliefs that inform the culture from whence it is issued (legally-determined as a sign of ownership). As Euro-American feminists and philosophers (including Peggy Kamuf and Jacques Derrida) have pointed out, the traditional Euro-American patronym in particular (such as Jones) is put in place out of masculine anxiety about the connection between the body of the father, his transferable seed, and the body of the mother who begets the baby that must be named. The patronym, Derrida insists, is thus really a sign of absence, loss, or *death*.[14] Kamuf amplifies this point, noting melancholically that, when I sign, "I am already dead because, according to the inexorable logic of the deictic or

REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA

UPRAVNA ENOTA

LJUBLJANA

Taksa po tarifni št.4.1. ZUT v znesku 1,06 EUR je plačana

IZPISEK IZ MATIČNEGA REGISTRA O ROJSTVU

Priimek	Janša		
Ime	Janez		
EMŠO	0712970500723	Spol	M
Datum rojstva	07.12.1970		
Kraj rojstva	Italija, Bergamo		
Državljanstvo	Slovenija		

Podatki o starših

	Priimek	Giuliani
Mati	Ime	Silvana
Oče	Priimek	Grassi
	Ime	Sergio

Poznejši vpisi:

Šifra: 2007/7225	Hočevar Velika
Datum: 03.08.2007	Priimek in ime matičarja

R00174554   MAT/REG-1

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
R00174554 (Birth Certificate), Ljubljana, 2007
Print on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm
Courtesy: Aksioma

REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
UPRAVNA ENOTA
LJUBLJANA

Taksa po tarifni št.4.1. ZUT v znesku 1,06 EUR je plačana

IZPISEK IZ MATIČNEGA REGISTRA O ROJSTVU

Priimek	Janša		
Ime	Janez		
EMŠO	0602964362319	Spol	M
Datum rojstva	06.02.1964		
Kraj rojstva	Hrvaška, Rijeka		
Državljanstvo	Slovenija		

Podatki o starših

Mati	Priimek	Hrvatin
	Ime	Ema
Oče	Priimek	Hrvatin
	Ime	Vito

Poznejši vpisi:
Sklenil zakonsko zvezo dne 17.11.1990.
Zakonec: Bašić Hrvatin Sandra

Šifra: 7053
Datum: 30.07.2007

M. P.

Debeljak Maja
Priimek in ime matičarja

R00174632   MAT/REG.1

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
R00174632 (Birth Certificate), Ljubljana, 2007
Print on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm
Courtesy: Aksioma

REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
UPRAVNA ENOTA
LJUBLJANA

Po 32. točki 28. člena Zakona o upravnih taksah (Uradni list RS, št. 42/07 - uradno prečiščeno besedilo, 126/07) oproščeno takse.

IZPISEK IZ MATIČNEGA REGISTRA O ROJSTVU

Priimek	Janša		
Ime	Janez		
EMŠO	2805973500487	Spol	M
Datum rojstva	28.05.1973, 12:40		
Kraj rojstva	Ljubljana		
Državljanstvo	Slovenije		

Podatki o starših
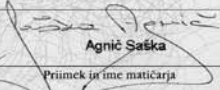
Mati	Priimek	Kariž	
	Ime	Nuša	
Oče	Priimek	Kariž	
	Ime	Andrej	

Poznejši vpisi:

Šifra:	2008		Agnič Saška
Datum:	05.09.2008		Priimek in ime matičarja

R00255017   MAT/REG-1

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
R00255017 (Birth Certificate), Ljubljana, 2007
Print on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm
Courtesy: Aksioma

shifter, its singular referent –me – will have already submitted to the requirement of its generalization in order to signify itself…
'I' spells the death of me; it is already the effacement of a singular nature…."[15]

The father (as a concept, signifying origins) motivates all naming in the Euro-American context, with the patronym a perfect example of a state-sanctioned performance of paternal certainty (in the face of its absence: before DNA testing, the man had to claim his offspring via the patronym for he could never be sure…). Women cannot figure in the patriarchal system of naming without forcing themselves on it, adopting the patronym and with it the accoutrements of masculinity it confers but only to the woman via a temporary loan which has its costs (Mrs. Margaret Thatcher, née Roberts, comes to mind). Within Euro-American culture, the proper name, the patronym, is tenuous on two accounts: it is both a feeble guarantor of copyright or legal "ownership" of creative products, which needs a body of law to sustain its authority, and a questionable means of claiming paternity in the face of its weak claim to ownership (of the woman's body; of the child). Unless women nominate and/or perform themselves as "masculine" (viz. 'Mrs. Thatcher') both of the structures that keep the patronym in power also keep women out of structures of legal

and state power.

Whether one is a feminist, an anti-racist activist, a Marxist, a queer theorist, or all of the above, reiterating the proper name – "Amelia Jones, art historian, author of this text" – is, as Derrida suggests, to succumb to Euro-American structures of belief, which are patriarchal and fundamentally linked to capitalism. The concept that we "own" what we make is both patriarchal (I sign with the patronym of my father to claim ownership in the face of the fact that I cannot in anyway link this text to my "self" in perpetuity: my "paternity" is suspect) and capitalist (many artists and writers join "rights" agencies such as ARS – Artists [sic] Rights Society – in order to protect their economic interests, only to find they are funding corporate interests rather than accruing wealth on the basis of their name and its copyrighted products[16]). We are caught in a catch 22: we can't avoid the name (viz. the debacle of the "artist formerly known as Prince"[17]), but neither can we gain control of its effects and capacity to confer power (or disgrace - as with Oscar Wilde in 1895, disgraced and his name sullied, no longer a signifier of dandy-esque wit but of depravity).

In contrast to these structures of belief Derrida offers critical and philosophical skepticism; the author is supposedly served by copyright law but she actually subordinates herself to it in order to

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[14] Derrida notes, "the patronym is… 'the name of my death, of my dead life'"; "Otobiographies: The Teaching of Nietzsche and the Politics of the Proper Name," tr. Avital Ronell, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation,* ed. Christie McDonald (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1982/1985), p. 16. Importantly, Derrida's understanding of the name unhinges popular (and art historical) beliefs about intentionality; the author of any note (whose work remains) inevitably dies before his name, giving the lie to our impulse to excavate her intentionality. "It is not a question of knowing what he would have thought, wanted, or done," p. 29.

[15] Kamuf, *Signature Pieces: On the Institution of Authorship* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1988), p. 5.

[16] See the Artists Rights Society website: http://www.arsny.com/ . Unfortunately these agencies end up benefiting the corporation rather than the artist, who gets a pittance of the fees charged to reproduce her or his work. Meanwhile the scholar must pay *out of pocket* to cover these fees in order to publish articles reproducing works by artists "represented" by the agency in academic journals or with academic presses. Who is benefiting from this permutation of copyright law? Certainly not individual "authors".

[17] The rock star Prince changed his name to a cipher in 1993, only to find that the media had to resort to calling him "the man formerly known as Prince", thus exacerbating rather than reducing the power of the name. He gave in and returned to the name Prince in 2000.

imagine her "work" is secured by her "name" and thus finds herself losing the financial value attached to her products to the bureaucracy of copyright-mongers (agencies or copyright lawyers), while also restricting who can say what about the images or words attached to her name. While the author may try to control the meaning and value of her work, the author as a subject with agency means little in the long-term, losing contact with the work as soon as she produces the work. The author's "intentionality" is lost even as she moves her hand across the page or programs the digital projector. Her signature becomes itself a "dead" weight, an indexical mark of her having been there, a signifier without clear referent (other than the array of ideas, places, people, or values associated with that name: for example, "Georgia O'Keeffe"←→New Mexico←→ Alfred Stieglitz: the patronym returns….).

Rather than securing a relationship to her true meaning as a subject, her true original intentions in making the work, the signature (the name) always already fails to deliver. Derrida stresses that once the author puts the work forth she is no longer the signatory; the author, rather, becomes, "the addressee who signs." There is, then, no "origin" to return to nor are there "precursors" who can be summoned as "influences" to secure our interpretation of the work (paradoxically, via our excavation of the author's own "intentions"): "This is precisely the paradox of the proper name or the signature. It's always the same thing, but each time it's different; each time it's a different history to which one must pay close attention."[18] Janez Janša. Janez Janša. Janez Janša.

Kamuf notes that the name as guarantor of the work functions in a contradictory fashion, whether one is a formalist, who believes that the work inherently expresses the author's intentions and thoughts through its structures or forms, or one is a historian, who claims external context is key in understanding the meaning and value of the work:

> In the first case, which is that of formalism, the signature is supposed to sign from within the work; the text thus encloses it and erects it as monument. If, however, the signature belongs to the inside, it can no longer appropriate the work, the monument remembers nothing outside itself, filiation is lost, and the thread of memory cannot be retraced. In the second case, which is that of historicism, the signature is supposed to sign from outside, the work stands apart and on its own, as if no singular, finite or limiting existence had had a hand in its realization.[19]

These are similar to the terms Derrida sketches in his famous essay "Signature Event Context" (1971), in which he explores how the written or made mark points us back to the authorial subject but, at the same time, always fails to deliver this subject. Writing or making art is an act of representation that "supplements presence" but never delivers it.[20] Most profoundly, Derrida notes that any kind of mark making is inexorably linked to the absence at the heart of human existence (we make as a communicative act, to mark our "presence" even as it slips away): "The sign is born at the same time as imagination and memory, at the moment when it is demanded by the absence of the object for present perception."[21] This evocation of the power of the name (of the signature) to indicate "presence"

[18] Derrida, *"Otobiographies,"* pp. 79, 84-5.

[19] Kamuf, *Signature Pieces*, p.p. 13-14.

[20] Derrida, "Signature Event Context" (1971), in , tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); p. 313.

[21] Ibid, p. 314

in the face of the subject's absence is also a crucial exploration of the impossible possibility of "context" as a means of defining what marks mean (in Kamuf's terms, of knowing the "history" that is, the cultural pressures, that supposedly informed the act). The written sign comes from its context and yet inevitably "carries with it a force of breaking with its context, that is, the set of presences which organize the moment of its inscription." By breaking with its moment of inscription – by *drifting* – the act of mark making affords the possibility of communicating the sign "by inscribing or *grafting* it onto other chains. No context can enclose it."[22]

Derrida's essay is clearly also a study of how mark making functions across time (we might in fact look to it as a model for how to do art history, literary history, or cultural history in general). In order to communicate, as he notes, the mark must be recognizable, having been made before and capable of being made again (it must be *iterable*) and yet it is fundamentally "new" in each instance. It is both identical and never-before enacted, each time; it is both the same and radically different. Iterability, Derrida notes, comes from the word iter (once again) which in turn comes from the Sanskrit *itera* (or *other*).[23] To be repeated is to be at once radically incommensurate with the first instance and to be "the same," recognizable as its copy. Like Janez Janša?

This sums up the conundrum of representation which Euro-American postmodern theory took on with particular alacrity in the 1980s – the time in which one Ivan (Janez) Janša was being arrested and performing himself as a radical irritant to the then-Yugoslavian state.

[22] I*bid.*, p. 317.

[23] I*bid.*, p. 315 .

Signature Event Context

In 1980s Yugoslavia, in the area that was soon to become the independent nation of "Slovenia," a group of artists, musicians, and theatre practitioners developed the *Neue Slovenische Kunst* (NSK) collective. Internationally, the best known arm of this collective is the group Laibach, the members of which adopted the accoutrements of Nazi Germany while playing music meshing a range of styles from industrial heavy metal to neo-classical and repetitively enacting in their videos clichéd Christian imagery (associated with traditional culture in Slovenia, which was historically the most conservative and Christian area in the Balkans).[24] The self-proclaimed Slovenian "monumental retro-avantgarde" of the NSK produced a founding manifesto stating:

We proclaim that copies have never existed and we recommend painting from pictures painted before our times. We claim that art cannot be judged from the viewpoint of time. We acknowledge the usefulness of all styles for the expression of our art, those past as well as present.[25]

Refusing iteration while mimicking mid-century fascists, Laibach and their colleagues intervene in postmodern discourse in a way incomprehensible outside the "context" of 1980s Ljubljana – but, as Derrida's theory convincingly indicates, this "context" cannot be fully known, and it cannot be retrieved as somehow "outside" their

[24] See Silber and Little, *The Death of Yugoslavia*, p. 49.

[25] Cited by Pil and Gallia Kolletiv, "RETRO/NECRO: From Beyond the Grave of the Politics of Re-Enactment," in *Art Papers* 20 (2007), on-line version: http://www.kollectiv. co.uk/Art%20Papers%20feature/ reenactment/retro-necro.htm, accessed 26th May 2008. See also the excellent history of NSK in "NSK 2000?," Joanne Richardson interviews Irwin and Eda Čufer, *Subsol* (January 2000, Ljubljana), available on-line at http://subsol.c3.hu/ subsol_2/contributors/nsktext. html; accessed 16th June 2008.

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cultural practice, telling us what it "means". And yet, one (a UK-based American scholar such as myself, for example) certainly must take some understanding of the situation in Slovenia into account when thinking about Laibach and the NSK in general inasmuch as Ljubljana is not New York City, where most of the dominant discourses about postmodernism in the visual arts were generated and reified. In the US, the 1960s and 1970s were characterized by social upheaval and a disastrous recession; American cities had their vital centres hollowed-out by suburbanization and the collapse of the industrial base. During the 1980s the US economy was being restructured by Reaganomics and its viciously classist "trickle-down" policy, which eviscerated social programs and made the rich richer and the poor poorer. Big cities like New York were in the early throes of gentrification and urban renewal, which put artists in a highly compromised position in relation to state power and corporate money. While New York was becoming restructured by late-capitalist values, Slovenia was undergoing a massive transformation from a socialist republic into a newly capitalist nation, with Janez Janša at the forefront of a successful youth rebellion.

These are two vastly different cultural systems: the "democratic," post-industrialized late capitalism of the USA –a culture driven by corporate interests in which artists are small cogs in a massive machine facilitating the circulation of capital – versus the shifting socialism of Yugoslavia which led into the right-of-centre representative "democracy" of today's Slovenia. In the latter situation, artists and intellectuals had been used to an environment in which they had either to take state funds to produce state-sanctioned cultural products or to work in covert ways

to strategize alternatives. These two systems have produced entirely different relations between artists and state or corporate power, and thus two different models of critical practice and two different ways of claiming agency and relating to the patronym. The dominant Euro-American model is linked to the historic avant-gardes of the 1910s and 1920s as theorized by Peter Bürger in his 1974 *Theory of the Avant-Garde*, a study that was influential in 1970s and 1980s debates about postmodernism in art discourse – where many critics and art historians sought to challenge the stronghold of Greenbergian formalism in Euro-American modernism. The historic avant-gardes in this model – which postmodern theorists and artists advocated adopting in the 1980s particularly in debates centering in New York City and London – drew on strategies of "making strange" (from Russian formalism's *ostranenie*), calling upon artists to employ "disidentificatory" methods of "shocking" the viewer, and on models of "critiquing" institutions by appropriating aspects of advertising culture in order to disrupt expectations as US postmodernism claimed to do. The new postmodern avant-gardes were to challenge existing value systems by appropriating the visual language of, say, advertising but reframing it in order to distance the viewer. As one of the most astute theorists of this mode of art-making, British feminist art historian Griselda Pollock, argued at the time, "[d]isidentificatory practices refer to the strategies for displacing the spectator from identifying with the illusory fictional worlds offered in art, literature and film disrupting the 'dance of ideology' which engages us on behalf of oppressive regimes of class, sexist, heterosexist and racist classifications and placements."[26]

[26] Pollock, "Screening the seventies; sexuality and representation in feminist practice—a Brechtian perspective," *Vision and Difference: Femininity, Feminism and the Histories of Art* (New York and London: Routledge, 1988), p. 158.

[27] See Hal Foster's reification of this binary in his "The Crux of Minimalism," *Individuals: A Selected History of Contemporary Art* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; and New York: Cross River Press, 1986), pp. 162-183; I discuss this binarization at length in my book *Irrational Modernism: A Neurasthenic History of New York Dada* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: MIT Press, 2004), p. 21.

[28] This is NSK member Borut Vogelnik in Joanne Richardson, "Interview: Neue Slowenische Kunst: Miran Mohar, Borut Vogelnik and Eda Čufer (Budapest, May 2000), published at *Art Margins*, at http://www.artmargins.com/content/interview/richardson2.html; accessed 18th June, 2008.

[29] "NSK 2000?," Richardson interviews Irwin and Eda Čufer.

Euro-American postmodern avant-gardism, then, was a refinement of a particular concept of the earlier twentieth-century European avant-gardes. Particularly with its feminist variants, this kind of avant-gardism pivoted around a binary, of "progressive" versus "regressive" practices.[27] In the case of feminism, this takes the form of a double binary between the masculine and the feminine and between the feminist and the patriarchal values she must "critique" through oppositional practice.

Because of its roots in Tito's "soft" totalitarianism, Slovenian culture demands an entirely different mode of articulating the artist's relationship to power. After all, cutting-edge artists had gone underground during the Yugoslavian period, "sitting in apartments" to develop alternative ways of "forming a community".[28] They could hardly be expected to "critique" or hope to overthrow the government or its economic value systems through strategies of "distanciation", which could only be imagined to have critical value in a late-capitalist "democracy", with its roots in the more hopeful earlier moments of avant-gardism linked to the splitting-off of industrial capitalist cultures from the Soviet bloc. Rather than a simple opposition to the monolithic state, Slovenian artists – since the reclaiming of Slovenia as a separate nation from the 1980s onward – have shrewdly articulated a nuanced relationship to power. As NSK member Miran Mohar has noted of the difference in their practice as opposed to Euro-American avant-gardism, "[In the Euro-American model there is a] permanent conflict between avant-garde and tradition. It is important to stress that [by contrast] our position from the beginning has not been to operate against existing institutions, or outside these institutions, but to create a parallel institution."[29] One way of achieving the latter is to take on the accoutrements of power to enact them otherwise, as with the JJJ project.

Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek has characterized Laibach's work in particular as taking its critical power not from "distancing" or other strategies associated with the Euro-American models of avant-gardism but from a strategy of "overidentification" that is completely at odds with these models. Rather than "critiquing" state power, the artists in Laibach, as Žižek argues, thus overidentified with fascist gestures and accoutrements in order to expose the otherwise invisible, hidden underside of fading Yugoslavian models of totalitarianism (with its links to Hitler's and Stalin's brutal stylizing of state power). Historian Alexei Monroe also notes of the NSK group's practice, in general, that they articulated a "retrogardism" that "attempts to free the present and change the future via the reworking of past utopianisms and historical wounds."[30] This retrogardism leads us back (or forward) to the JJJ project, which resonates in terms of this complex history of Slovenian culture.

Mourning, Constituting the Self…
and the Power of the Name

The Derridean "Signature Event Context…" of the JJJ project can never be pinned down or fully understood as explanatory of what their complex gesture of self-naming signifies. But, at the very least, someone exploring it from the vantage point of Euro-American culture should make an attempt to sketch the bare bones of how the radical differences and subtle "sameness" of the iteration of the name in the Slovenian context means at this point in time. Clearly the JJJ project cannot be viewed as simply an attempt on the part of three artists to "critique" Janez Janša's regime (as one might be more tempted to interpret a group of US artists who were to take on the name "George Bush"); it is not oppositional, nor (according to them) is this act of renaming an art project at all. It seems to me this gesture is linked to the NSK strategies noted above, summarized in the words of NSK member Eda Čufer, "[Over-i]dentification, mimicking, rewriting something always brings a new moment, insight, or perception…."[31]

Derrida notes in "Signature Event Context" that "the sign is born at the same time as imagination and memory, at the moment when it is demanded by the absence of the object for present perception."[32] Signing— communication, and the establishment of the subject as one who "speaks"—takes

place through this constellation of forces. With their performance work *Signature Event Context* at the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin in 2008 the JJJ project most recently addressed Derrida's points in relation to memorials as engaging each visitor in an act of remembrance.[33] Citing Derrida from his essay on the "empirical non-presence of the signer," JJJ enacted themselves as traces in a haunted space. Each Janša overidentified with the mournful significance of the site itself as well as with their namesake's and those named otherwise, navigating a path through the memorial using a GPS device, while chanting continuously (in Slovenian) "My name is Janez Janša." Speaking himself as Janša, each of these creative subjects marks his "presence" but *as an other* (or, as Derrida puts it, his presence *as absence*, his "identity" as *radical difference*). Or, rather, each performs as himself, but renamed as the Prime Minister of Slovenia. Or, is each taking the name away from the Prime Minister and enacting Janez Janša as something else entirely? What does the memorial (and the name) mean if it is taken away from its original referent and enacted otherwise by subjects who say they are someone (else) whose identity they have taking on deliberately through appropriating his name? They sign themselves vocally, making the memorial into (perhaps) a site of mourning for the death of idealism (as well as the death of those persecuted in the Holocaust); a site of mourning over Janez Janša's own

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[30] Alexei Monroe, *Interrogation Machine: Laibach and NSK* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2005), p. 120; cited by Pil and Gallia Kollectiv in "RETRO/NECRO."

[31] Interestingly, Čufer uses the term "identification" rather than "overidentification" but the sense is the same as Žižek's elaborated term, which, this interview makes clear, was articulated in relation to the practice of NSK members, who had been attending the "Slovenian Lacanian School" lectures and were in dialogue with Žižek during this period. See "NSK 2000?," Richardson interviews Irwin and Eda Čufer.

[32] Derrida, "Signature Event Context," p. 314.

[33] The performance was scheduled for the opening evening of Transmediale.08 on January 29th, 2008 in Berlin but the piece was cancelled by the artistic director of the festival, Stephen Kovats, and the guest curator, Nataša Petrešin Bachelez. Documentation and recording relating to the work are available at www.aksioma. org/sec .

transformation from one type of subject (left wing agitator) to another (oppressor, bureaucrat).

It is, of course, a false project to over-interpret – to give some kind of final meaning to this complex act of naming, walking, chanting, finding a way through a complex social space of memory and loss. The JJJ projects thus beg some crucial questions not just about the power of the name to confer power or disgrace, to enact subjects as agents (origins of "world pictures") or as objects of oppression, but also about the ways in which culture functions in a time when binaries no longer have purchase, in a time in which global networks of capital, information,

and power over-determine meaning and value even as they undermine any possibility of fixing either. In borrowing names and past cultural gestures, the JJJ project marks the making of histories in a critical way, highlighting the fact that they *take place through acts of enunciation and bodily comportment*, the results of which are never secure and never final. This may be the most potent (or, indeed, the only potent) avenue of "critique" open to cultural workers today – an avenue that is not "oppositional" but "overidentificatory," always already penetrated with absence, with the debased and debasing values of late capitalism, with loss.