

Blaž Lukan

The Janez Janša Project



Janez Janša

Jaz sem Janez Janša,

Intervention on the Multi-touch Collaboration Wall by Perceptive Pixel,
WIRED NextFest 07, Los Angeles Convention Centre, Los Angeles, 2007

Courtesy: Aksioma

The title of this essay is *The Janez Janša Project*, but this project needs, first of all, to be proven; we need to prove that there is indeed a “project” deserving this name;

that a planned action has been carried out, which can be understood as a performative act. We must also prove that we are not dealing simply with an intimate, private, act, for whose analysis there is no place in the context of performance studies. There are certainly a handful of signs that point to the latter; the three Slovenian artists who have decided to change their names to Janez Janša have remained silent regarding their decisions and have offered no comments regarding the change, stating only that this was an intimate, personal decision, which requires no public rationalization. It was simply a change of name, which constitutes the individual’s civic right and which – at least in Slovenia – requires no explanation (not even a formal administrative one).

¹This is warranted by the nature of the “project”, while the fact that we can, at least to some extent, assume an intimate stance towards an intimate performance, which, after all, is what *The Janez Janša Project* supposedly is, further justifies such a perspective.

✂ If we think about this issue in an entirely personal context¹ we have to admit that the change of name of one of the

performers is particularly perplexing, even shameful.² What are we now supposed to call the man who was called Emil Hrvatin before he changed his name to Janez Janša?

Of course, if we respect the individual’s “intimate decision” – which is what the artist has emphatically pointed to on a number of occasions – there should be no dilemma; Emil Hrvatin is now Janez Janša. However, in a completely private situation, addressing (the former) Emil as

²We find appropriate explanations of shame in Agamben (*Remnants of Auschwitz/Kar ostaja od Auschwitzta*) and Žižek (*Kako biti nihče*): shame as de-subjectification, powerlessness, disappearance of the self as the subject, shame as a reaction to disclosure, etc. We can “find ourselves” in all of them.

Janez – and not just any “Slovenian” Janez (by the way, Emil Hrvatin is Croatian by birth), but rather precisely that Janez, i.e. Janez Janša, the Slovenian Prime Minister – has not come easily to the author of this essay, and I must admit that I actually avoided seeing this Janez Janša for a while. I will not discuss the most fundamental reasons for this here, but they are certainly connected to my relationship with the most prominent owner of this name.

Nonetheless, in this text, I will challenge this account, which understands the change of name not as a project, but rather as a personal decision of the three artists, on a number of key points. The first counter-argument concerns the public nature of this change. The three individuals who decided to change their name appear regularly in public, in various contexts, mostly to do with art; their name change is thus public not only in the administrative sense (administratively speaking, data such as names belong to the private sphere while being, at the same time, publicly accessible in places like phone books), but also in the broader sense of the public sphere. The decision was made

by three artists, not three anonymous individuals, and two of them are active in the field of contemporary performing arts; moreover, in their work, these artists often problematize the foundations of contemporary art practices. So we can hypothesize – for now, though we have no proof to claim this – that their name change concerns their art practice and artistic activities.

✕ What, then, is a change of name? Legally speaking, this is a civil right, for which, in

³ The official response to the question posed to a Slovenian administrative body on the web portal *e-uprava* on 3 October 2007 – if there exists, for instance, a list of names which the citizens cannot change their names into – states: “Such a list does not exist.” There is, however, a statement in a chapter of The Issue of the Provision regarding the Change of Personal Name webpage of *e-uprava* at the State Portal of the Republic of Slovenia, which reads: “Personal name is a personal right of each citizen. Every person is obliged to use their personal name. This consists of a name and a surname. Personal name can be changed. [...] Decisions regarding the change of personal name are made by the administrative body, with which the application was lodged. [...] When personal name is changed, all personal documents used for the purpose of identification must be changed. The former personal name can be verified with a birth certificate.” (<http://e-uprava.gov.si/e-uprava/dogodkiPreivalci.euprava?zdid=110&sid=147;25> September 2007).

⁴ Restrictions are imposed in the cases of individuals who are involved in legal proceedings; one cannot change one’s name into the name of a famous person if the purpose of the change is profit or mockery; it is impossible to take on a name that is protected by copyright or that is insulting, etc.

Slovenia, there are virtually no formal restrictions³. Therefore, it is the result of the individual’s entirely personal decision, which is legalized by an official institution⁴. The situation in the United States, for instance, is different, as we can see if we read the *Wikipedia* entry for “name change” (1st October 2007). In America, there exists a complex legal system that regulates the change of name, and the decision is in the discretionary power of the court. Since this is not only a legally compelling field but, also, often an

entertaining one, we should have a look at a few illustrative examples. In the United States, names are often changed for political reasons that are more transparent than the ones we are dealing with in our case. For instance, the son of the famous social activist Abbie Hoffman has changed his name to america Hoffman, with the first letter of America in lower-case, because he wants to emphasize his non-chauvinist patriotism. In another instance, the candidate Byron Looper changed his name – for reasons related to his pre-election campaign – to Byron Low Tax Looper; while the name change might have helped him win his position as “tax assessor” the 1998 murder put an abrupt end to his political ascent. For less politically-ambitious but, nevertheless, engaged reasons, a man called Rob changed his name into Free Rob Cannabis, while another man is now called Nigel Freemarijuana, and yet another person has adopted the name Goveg.com to promote a vegan website. The person whose new name is Kentucky Fried Cruelty.com requires no further commentary, nor does the man who had to pay an unjustly imposed £20 fine and has since changed his name to Yorkshire Bank PLC Are Fascist Bastards. We could also mention the guy who used to be called David Fearn, but whose new name comprises the titles of all existing James Bond movies... All this to say that, the change of name has a special place, which depends on the (various) strategies and is related to the motivation of the naming. Anonymity is a pre-identitarian principle, but to take on a pseudonym is to adopt a cryptonym. A nickname gives the nicknamed person a playful, prosthetic identity, and the change of name offers a new identity, which – depending on the choice of name – can bring about various associations with the name and its owner.

The second counter-argument concerns the choice of name. The three artists did not pick just any name, they chose Janez Janša – the name of the Slovenian Prime Minister, the president of the centre-Right *Slovenska Demokratska Stranka* (Slovenian democratic party), the front man of the Slovenian right wing. No doubt, the choice of name indicates a certain agenda. If we know anything about these three artists' worldviews – or at least about the worldviews of two of them – we can say, with certainty, that they are closer to the Left, and that they have been critical

of the political stance and policies associated with the best-known (though the Telephone Register of Slovenia lists seven individuals called Janez Janša) owner of the name Janez Janša. We can deduce this conclusion from their artistic actions, manifestoes, and performances. Take Janez Janša formerly known as Emil Hrvatin, for example, his editorials in *Maska* and his activities as one of the leaders of the Association of Non-Governmental Organizations confirm our assumption. Take Janez Janša formerly known as Davide Grassi, his artistic projects

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REPUBLIKA SLOVENIJA
UPRAVNA ENOTA LJUBLJANA
SEKTOR ZA UPRAVNE NOTRANJE ZADEVE
ODDELEK ZA MATIČNE ZADEVE
1000 LJUBLJANA, Tobačna ulica 5
Telefon: 01 206 12 13, Telefaks: 01 206 21 02
e-pošta: uc.ljubljana@gov.si

Številka: 211-1403/2007-6(23105)
Datum: 21.06.2007

Upravna enota Ljubljana izdaja na podlagi 18. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu (Uradni list RS, št. 20/2006) na zahtevo Emila Hrvatina, stanujočega v Ljubljani, Slomškova ulica 27, za spremembo osebnega imena, naslednje:

ODLOČBO

1. Emilu HRVATINU, roj. 06.02.1964 na Rijeki, Hrvaška, se dovoli sprememba osebnega imena v novo osebno ime JANEZ JANŠA.
2. Sprememba osebnega imena na podlagi odločbe velja od dneva vročitve odločbe.
3. Posebnih stroškov v postopku ni bilo.

Obrazložitev

Emil HRVATIN je z vlogo dne 08.06.2007 na takojšnji upravni enoti zaprosil za spremembo osebnega imena. V vlogi je navedel, da želi pridobiti novo osebno ime JANEZ JANŠA.

Zahtevek je utemeljen. Uradno je bilo ugotovljeno, da ni zadržkov za spremembo osebnega imena iz 19. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu, zato je bilo v skladu z 10. členom tega zakona odločeno, kot je navedeno v izreku odločbe.

Na podlagi 2. odstavka 21. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu (Uradni list RS, št. 20/2006) sprememba osebnega imena na podlagi odločbe velja za polnoletno osebo od dneva vročitve odločbe.

Glede na določbo 1. odstavka 118. člena Zakona o splošnem upravnem postopku je ugotovljeno, da posebnih stroškov v postopku ni bilo.

Postopni pravni sredstva:

Zoper to odločbo je dovoljena pritožba na Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve Republike Slovenije. Pisna pritožba se izročil naravnost ali pa pošlje po pošti na Upravno enoto Ljubljana, Sektor za upravne notranje zadeve, Oddelek za matične zadeve, Tobačna ulica 5, 1000 Ljubljana. Na navedenem naslovu se lahko poda pritožba tudi ustno na zapisknik. Pritožba se vloži v roku 15 (petnajst) dni od dneva vročitve odločbe. Taksa za pritožbo v znesku 14,18 EUR po tar. št. 2 Zakona o upravnih taksah (Uradni list RS, št. 42/07-uradno prečiščeno besedilo) se plača osebno pri organu ali s položnico na področju enotnega zakladniškega računa Upravne enote Ljubljana, št. 01100-8450001482 s slikovno številko 00 240300-200.

Taksa po taksi tarifi št. 1 in 21 Zakona o upravnih taksah (Uradni list RS, št. 42/07 – uradno prečiščeno besedilo) v znesku 46,09 EUR je plačana v gotovini, potrdilo je priloženo k vlogi.

Postopek vodila
Maja RADKOVIČ, inž. 1. r. o. v. m.
VIŠJI REFERENT-MATIČAR



Svetka TIVADAR, univ. dipl. prav.
VODJA ODDELKA

- VROČITI:
1. Emil HRVATIN- osebno
Slomškova ulica 27
1101 Ljubljana

- OBVESTITI:
1. Upravna enota Ljubljana, SUNZ, Oddelek za matične zadeve
-za vpis v matični register

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Emil Hrvatin, born 06.02.1964 in Rijeka, Croatia,
is allowed the change of his personal name to the
new personal name, Janez Janša, Ljubljana, 2007
Two prints on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm each
Courtesy: Aksioma

as *DemoKino - Virtual Biopolitical Agora or Test Ballot - Examining the Fault Machinery of Democracy*. And take Janez Janša formerly known as Žiga Kariž, for example his project *Terror=Decor*. Since the new name, therefore, cannot be simply the result of a fascination with PM Janša (which could indeed be the motivation for a name change), for the three artists through their choice of name reach into a certain traumatic core – in this case, the traumatic core of the Slovenian state and its transition – the reason for the

change must lie somewhere else. We can assume, then, that we are dealing with a conscious – even conceptual – decision (at least two of the artists involved are often classified precisely as conceptual artists), for we can discern in this name change an act of a conscious and carefully planned *over-identification*, which exceeds the personal, intimate character of the decision and which manifests itself, first and foremost, as its critical point.

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UPRAVNA ENOTA LJUBLJANA
SEKTOR ZA UPRAVNE NOTRANJE ZADEVE
ODDELEK ZA MATIČNE ZADEVE
1000 LJUBLJANA, Tobučna ulica 5
Telefon: 01 506 32 13, Telefaks: 01 506 32 42
e-pošta: se.ljubljana@gov.si

Številka: 211-1472/2007-6(23105)
Datum: 29.06.2007

Upravna enota Ljubljana izdaja na podlagi 18. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu (Uradni list RS, št. 20/2006) na zahtevo Davideja GRASSI, stanujočega v Ljubljani, Neubergerjeva ulica 25, za spremembo osebnega imena, nasledilno

ODLOČBO

1. Davideju GRASSI, roj. 07.12.1970 v kraju Bergamo, Italija, se dovoli sprememba osebnega imena v novo oseбно ime Janez JANŠA.
2. Sprememba osebnega imena na podlagi odločbe velja od dneva vročitve odločbe.
3. Posebnih stroškov v postopku ni bilo.

Obrazložitev

Davide GRASSI je z vlogo dne 18.06.2007 na tukajšnji upravni enoti zaprosil za spremembo osebnega imena. V vlogi je navedel, da želi pridobiti novo oseбно ime Janez JANŠA.

Zahtevek je utemeljen. Uradno je bilo ugotovljeno, da ni zadržkov za spremembo osebnega imena iz 19. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu, zato je bilo v skladu z 10. členom tega zakona odločeno, kot je navedeno v izreku odločbe.

Na podlagi 2. odstavka 21. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu (Uradni list RS, št. 20/2006) sprememba osebnega imena na podlagi odločbe velja za polnoletno osebo od dneva vročitve odločbe.

Glede na določbo 1. odstavka 118. člena Zakona o splošnem upravnem postopku je ugotovljena, da posebnih stroškov v postopku ni bilo.

Peuk o pravnem sredstvu:

Zoper to odločbo je dovoljena pritožba na Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve Republike Slovenije. Pisna pritožba se izroči naravnost ali pa pošlje po pošti na Upravno enoto Ljubljana, Sektor za upravne notranje zadeve, Oddelek za matične zadeve, Tobučna ulica 5, 1000 Ljubljana. Na navedenem naslovu se lahko poda pritožba tudi ustno na zapisnik. Pritožba se vložiti v roku 15 (petnajsti) dni od dneva vročitve odločbe. Taksa za pritožbo v znesku 14,18 EUR po tar. št. 2 Zakona o upravnih taksah (Uradni list RS, št. 42/07-uradno prečiščeno besedilo) se plača oseбно pri organu ali s polnočlno na podračun enotnega zakladniškega računa Upravne enote Ljubljana, št. 01100-8450001482 s sklicno številko 00 240300-200.

Taksa po takсни tarifi št. 1 in 21 Zakona o upravnih taksah (Uradni list RS, št. 42/07 – uradno prečiščeno besedilo) v znesku 46,09 EUR je plačana v gotovini, potrjeno je priloženo k vlogi.

Postopek vodila
Maja RADIKOVIČ, inž. prom.
VIŠJI REFERENT-MATIČAR



Saška TIVĀDAR, univ. dipl. prav.
VODJA ODDELKA

- VROČITI:

1. Davide GRASSI - oseбно
Neubergerjeva ulica 25
1113 Ljubljana

- OBVESTITI:

1. Upravna enota Ljubljana, SUNZ, Oddelek za matične zadeve
-za vpis v matični register

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Davide Grassi, born 07.12.1970 in Bergamo, Italy, is allowed the change of his personal name to the new personal name, Janez Janša, Ljubljana, 2007
Two prints on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm each
Courtesy: Aksioma

With the change of name, the three artists could not assume the real economic and political power of the prime minister; they did, however, usurp the symbolic power entailed in his “bare” name. The equation we can make, then, is valid at the level of the name change, that is, Emil Hrvatin + Davide Grassi + Žiga Kariž = Janez Janša; the three artists have exchanged their own real power – which they all definitely possessed in their own, somewhat more limited, social sphere of contemporary arts (performing arts in

the case of two artists, and visual arts in the third case) – for the symbolic power of the “original” owner of their new name. In an economic-marketing sense, then, Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi, and Žiga Kariž have traded their brand names, while the market effect of this trade (or re-branding) has not been entirely transparent, as the performer Janez Janša notes in the interview with Tanja Lesničar Pučko (20).⁵ However, what about the effect of the retroactive power of the name change, of its inadvertent

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UPRAVNA ENOTA LJUBLJANA
SEKTOR ZA UPRAVNE NOTRANJE ZADEVE
ODDELEK ZA MATIČNE ZADEVE
8000 LJUBLJANA, TOBAČNA ULICA 5
Telefoni: 01 306 32 44, Telefaks: 01 306 32 42
e-pošta: ua.ljubljana@gov.si

Številka: 211-1484/2007-6 (23106)
Datum: 1.05.07.2007

Upravna enota Ljubljana izdaja na podlagi 18. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu (Uradni list RS, št. 20/2006) na zahtevo Žige KARIŽA iz Ljubljane, Triglavskva ulica 49, za spremembo osebnega imena, naslednjo

ODLOČBO

1. Žigi KARIŽU, roj. 28.05.1973 v Ljubljani, se dovoli sprememba osebnega imena v novo osebno ime JANEZ JANŠA.
2. Sprememba osebnega imena na podlagi odločbe velja od dneva vročitve odločbe.
3. V postopku ni bilo posebnih stroškov.

— Obrazložitev —

Žiga KARIŽ je z vlogo dne 19.06.2007 pri takajšnji upravni enoti prosil za spremembo osebnega imena. V vlogi je navedel, da želi pridobiti novo osebno ime JANEZ JANŠA.

Zahtevek je utemeljen. Uradno je bilo ugotovljeno, da ni zadržkov za spremembo osebnega imena iz 19. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu, zato je bilo v skladu z 10. členom tega zakona odločeno kot je navedeno v izreku odločbe.

Na podlagi 2. odstavka 21. člena Zakona o osebnem imenu (Uradni list RS, št. 20/2006), sprememba osebnega imena na podlagi odločbe velja za polnoletno osebo od dneva vročitve odločbe.

Glede na določbo 1. odstavka 118. člena Zakona o splošnem upravnem postopku (Uradni list RS, št. 24/06 – uradno prečiščeno besedilo, 119/05) je ugotovljeno, da posebnih stroškov v postopku ni bilo.

Pouk o pravnem sredstvu:

Zoper to odločbo je dovoljena pritožba na Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve Republike Slovenije. Pisna pritožba se izroči naravnost ali pa pošlje po pošti na Upravno enoto Ljubljana, Sektor za upravne notranje zadeve, Oddelček za matične zadeve, Tobočna ulica 5, 1000 Ljubljana. Na navedenem naslovu se lahko pritožite tudi usno na zapisnik. Pritožba se vloži v roku 15 (petnajst) dni od dneva vročitve odločbe. Taksa za pritožbo v znesku 14,18 EUR po tar. št. 2 Zakona o upravnih taksah (Uradni list RS, št. 42/07 - uradno prečiščeno

besedilo) se plača z gotovino ali s polnočlno na podračun enotnega zakladniškega računa Upravne enote Ljubljana št. 01100-8450001482 s sklično številko 00 240300-200.

Taksa po takšni tarifi št. 1 in 21 Zakona o upravnih taksah (Ur. list RS, št.42/07 - uradno prečiščeno besedilo) v znesku 46,09 EUR je plačana v gotovini, potrdilo je priloženo k vlogi.

Postopek vpelja

Mateja SVETAK
VIŠJI REFERENT - MATIČAR



Danica KRONEGGER, univ.dipl.psih.
VODJIA REFERATA

- VROČITI:

1. Žiga KARIŽ - osebno
Triglavskva ulica 49
1113 Ljubljana

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
Žiga Kariž, born 28.05.1973 in Ljubljana, Slovenia,
is allowed the change of his personal name to the new
personal name, Janez Janša, Ljubljana, 2007
Two prints on paper, 29,7 x 21 cm each
Courtesy: Aksioma

multiplication, on the original owner? The original Janez Janša seems to have remained untouched by this change, he has remained intact after the “lease” of his name; there have been no noticeable or polemical official

⁵ We could further consider the fact that the artists have indeed given up their individual names, but in exchange, they have acquired a collective name, and a fetishistic one at that. The latter, the collective and fetishistic name, has no doubt contributed to the fact that the artists now appear in collective projects such as *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* or *Signature Event Context* (see <http://www.aksioma.org/sec/press.html>) – in which the artists inscribed their collective name into the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin – more often than ever before. The relationship between the inadvertent or “spontaneous theatricalization” and conceptualized performative action is dynamic in *The Janez Janša Project*, and it should be examined anew with each new “event”.

⁶ They were seen at the ceremony where the results of the Slovenian presidential election were announced in October 2007; more specifically, they were seen in the headquarters of Lojze Peterle, the candidate supported by “their” party. They appeared as intriguing interviewees in a short interview recorded on this occasion by POP TV, in which the performer Janez Janša explained the reasons for their coming to Peterle’s election office: to congratulate the presidential candidate on his victory in the first round of the election. Janša answered the journalist’s question, if this is an art project, by saying that it is not, unless she herself interprets it in this way.

who bears this name (there are at least ten of them now). If we try to theorize their act, we could say that they have produced a series. The series and its effects are invoked; for

reactions from the government or his party, or at least none that we know of. We do not know whether or not the appearance of the name Janez Janša in new and unexpected contexts (to which we will return below) has had any effect on his public visibility or popularity.

The third counter-argument is related to the decision that all three artists assume the same name. Of course this decision could be simply personal, but it is a fact that the three artists chose the same name and they thus achieved a certain degree of identity with the best-known Janez Janša and – after all – everyone else

instance, an exclamation that witnesses have attributed to Janez Janša formerly known as Davide Grassi at his wedding, “The more of us there are, the faster we can achieve our goal!” This is the motto of PM Janša’s SDS, the party that now counts these three new Janšas as new members.⁶ The Janšas are also hinted at in *We are all Marlene Dietrich FOR*, the title of one of the latest performances by Janez Janša, who was still known as Emil Hrvat in at the time of the performance, and the series is also attested to by the joint appearances of the artists, who have, for example, collaborated as a group in the exhibition at Mala galerija in Ljubljana entitled *Triglav – OHO, Irwin, Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša*,⁷ whose performer and publicist, visual artist, and intermedia artist are all called Janez Janša.

Let’s think about this then: on the one hand, there is the intimate personal decision made by three citizens of the Republic of Slovenia to change their names, but, on the other hand, there is the decision of three artists, three public figures – at least two of whom are involved in contemporary performing practices – and their decision concerns a charged name, the name of the Prime Minister, a right-wing politician. The three artists have assumed this name and thus produced a series, which points less towards the assumed name as such than towards the meaning and effect of the series itself. “The other hand” of this contemplation, then, seems stronger and it invites the thought that this is a performative project, but to be able to prove this, begin at the beginning.

✎ However, before we go straight back, we need to ask ourselves what has truly

⁷ The exhibition was at Mala galerija in Ljubljana from 15th October until 15th November 2007.

happened with the change of name. In a personal as well as in a civic sense, the life of the three artists has, no doubt, changed significantly. We can gather this from the fact that they have changed their names in all contexts, the artistic as well as the private ones, in which they had been appearing until the moment of the change. The names Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi, and Žiga Kariž have disappeared, so to speak, from the public sphere partly and even retroactively (for example, the biography of the performer and publicist Janez Janša, for instance, states not that the performance *Miss Mobile* was directed by Emil Hrvatin – which can be proven – but rather that it was directed by Janez Janša),⁸ although we can say, in accordance with empirical facts, that their bodies and personalities have remained the same. Externally and physically, the three artists have not changed, at least not thus far (which is probably a source of disappointment for those who believe that the three artists are “performing” a role of Janez Janša). Their performance is not simply a form of artistic masquerading, and judging from the information available to the public, they have kept up their artistic activities. It is a fact, however, that the “former” Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi and Žiga Kariž no longer exist; there are three people called Janez Janša or – in the sphere of arts – there is the performer and publicist Janez Janša, there is the mixed-media artist Janez Janša, and there is the visual artist Janez Janša. The event, then, that was triggered by the change

of readers. Yet, *Janez Janša* is not just a triple performative event, or rather, it is not only Janez Janša (the most famous owner of the name) that reveals himself in the event, in the performative, so to speak; the event also represents its authors and, at the same time, the (new) owners of the name. In so doing, however, through their “modification” or “filter”, the event unmistakably points back to the original, “master”, owner of the name and thus also to the problematic real and symbolic power that coalesces in his name as well as in his person.⁹

What else can a change of name mean? It is actually a private act, closely connected with the individual’s inner motives and, as such, his or her personality and his or her identity. It entails giving up a part of one’s former identity and personal history as well as one’s self-image and possibly, the way one is seen by others. This image is closely connected with one’s name and the assumption of a new name which is, in effect, the assumption of a new identity. The change of name, then, is not only an intimate performance, it is also a peculiar social spectacle. The name – even though it is originally assigned to one arbitrarily, at birth, at christening, or when the newborn is registered in the records – signifies one’s legal, administrative, identity as well as one’s intimate self becomes merely representation through this name change; the change legalizes, or rather, reveals, precisely the original randomness of the name.

✂ As an introduction to the problematics of identity – which we will only touch upon briefly here – let’s summarize the autobiographic story of American feminist theorist Peggy Phelan, recounted in her book *Unmarked*. Her account might help us elucidate the subtext of naming and

⁸ See http://www.maska.si/sl/sodelavci/umetniki/janez_jansa_1/.

⁹ Let’s say in their identity, although we could also pose the question of their possible division, but this would exceed the scope of our discussion here.

of name is called *Janez Janša*. This is how it is perceived by the public, and this is how it manifests itself to its viewers and

re-naming. Peggy grew up in a family with six children, where her mother could not remember all the children's names and her father invented new names for the kids to be able to memorize them. The result, as experienced by Phelan, was an "absolute break between the sign and the referent", which became a form of the child's play in their home, and the failure of the name to grant the child an identity was an everyday experience in their household. The children realized that identity did not derive from the name in the way that, according to Phelan, has become the "substitutional economy" of the family. Identity, then, resides neither within the name, which can be uttered, nor in the body, which can be seen; it is the result of the failure of the body to completely embody one's existence and the result of the failure of the signifier to express precise meaning. Identity is perceivable only through the relationship with the other, which is a form of simultaneous resistance and support; it marks the boundary where the self differentiates itself from the other and where it also merges with the other. However, in this declaration of identity, Phelan says, there is always loss, the loss of not being the other while remaining dependent upon the other to be seen, to exist. Phelan thus introduces the notions of the self and its relationship to the name, the relationship to the other and the boundary between the two, with the most exciting part of her discussion focusing on the concept of loss (p. 11–13).

Equally compelling is the reflection of Michel Foucault in his *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (*This is Not a Pipe*), where he writes about the principle within the field of fine arts of "equivalence between the fact of similitude and the establishment of a representational link". Between the pipe and the painted

eponymous sentence, which appears in Magritte's painting, Foucault claims, there exists a bulge which divides their formerly shared space; it is a gap or a void, which points to the absence of space (similar to the border that separates the image and the text), to the erasure of the "shared space". The proliferation of negations – this is not a pipe, this painting is not a pipe, this written statement is not a pipe, this image of a pipe is not a pipe, etc. – renders the image of the pipe and the text – which should (through negation) name the image – unable to find the "space where they converge and attach themselves to one another". Magritte "names his paintings," Foucault argues, "to show respect for the act of naming. Yet, in this draughty space, unusual relationships are formed, incursions happen, unexpected and devastating invasions take place, images fall into the domain of words, verbal flashes furrow the images and make them break down into a thousand pieces." (Foucault, p. 27) Foucault's aggressive, militant vocabulary posits naming as a battle, which is not an act of identification but rather an act of conflict and division, an act of de(con)struction. Between the name and the self, there is war, which necessarily leads to loss, as Phelan opines. Foucault claims that similitude always has a "guardian" and "to be similar always presupposes a reference, which prescribes and classifies". What represents what, who is the original, and which the copy are the questions that hierarchise and lead into the "monarchy" of meanings; but there will come a day, Foucault concludes, "when the image itself, together with the name that belongs to the image, is de-identified by similitude, and transferred into infinity along an entire series. Campbell, Campbell, Campbell, Campbell." (p. 42)

JANEZ JANŠA
 ŽIGA KARIŽ
 It's so Simple and that's the Way I Like it
 2005/07

Former name replaced with the new one at the exhibition *Land(e)scape*, Künstlerhaus, Graz, 2007
 Photo: Janez Janša

Therefore, between the name and identity or (self-) image, a gap or a bulge appears, as Foucault argues, a gap which leaves the name on one side and puts the individual's self on the other, and throws into relief the arbitrariness of the connection between the two. The name becomes a sliding signifier and thus sheds light on the problematic nature of considering identity as something predetermined or determined once and for all, and suddenly, we notice its (Badiouean) multiple, its (Foucauldian) multiplicity.

Furthermore, if we know that this sphere of identity is one of the primary arenas of

¹⁰ From the extensive register of body art let's mention only the French artist or, more accurately, body artist Orlan here. She problematises the issues of identity and (self) image through conceptual plastic surgery performed on her face. See also <http://www.orlan.net/> (17th January 2008).

contemporary art practices, including performing arts,¹⁰ we can begin to understand the change of name of the three Slovenian artists in this

sense, as a change enacted in the field of performativity. Between Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi, Žiga Kariž and Janez Janša, there is, then, no simple hierarchical relationship that would also have psychological connotations; the link between them is discursive. As soon as we assume that Janez Janša is in fact a project or a performative event, its internal relations are established anew. In the sequence introduced by Foucault with the development of European painting in mind, the sequence of similitude – representation – signification (p. 63), *The Janez Janša Project* falls into the category of the paradigm that is also applicable to the development of theatre and performing arts. Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi and Žiga Karž in conception or Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša in realization thus exploits a certain elementary form of representation, similitude. Yet, he does not adopt it for the purpose of representing anything; rather, with its

performative act, it ends up in the realm of signification. Signification is produced by the play of meanings, which is triggered by the collision of similitude and representation. In the process of identity, which unfolds as a battle between the image and representation, what is left is loss.

An additional confirmation of this thesis about performativity comes from the fact that the change of name was carried out by three artists, two of whom, as already mentioned, have been working in the field of performing arts and expanding the field's thematic and strategic horizons through original and witty projects (such as the project of Janez Janša, then Emil Hrvatin, *Refugee Camp for First World Citizens* [2004], or the project of Janez Janša, then Davide Grassi, with Igor Štromajer, *Problemarket.com-The Problem Stock Exchange* [2001]). It is also confirmed by the fact that the three artists, through their name change, have produced a series, which is a common phenomenon or concept in contemporary (visual) arts. Moreover, if we can understand the change of name in the sense of identity as a body-art event of sorts (by which I mean not only the rupture between the individual and his/her name, that is, a rupture in one's identity, but also the common, albeit pathological, bodily changes that a name change triggers), the production of the series is most forcefully inscribed precisely in the fields of the social and the political; in other words, the production of the series becomes an ideological inscription. The series leads to the disappearance of the subject, to its emptying or de-subjectification. The series – with its continuation ad *infinitum* – produces a sequence of empty signifiers, which can then be filled at random with new content. The series is authorised through absence; the self in the series appears, as Žižek argues, as the “pure void

of auto-referential signification” (Kako, p. 171), as an empty name. A causal chain appears between the three artists and the “original”¹¹ Janez Janša; the chain produces a posterior identity, which in turn raises the fundamental question of the referent. What is at stake, then, is not the disappearance of Emil Hrvatin,

Davide Grassi, and Žiga Kariž as artists, public figures or citizens, but rather the concurrent disappearance of Janez Janša, as the name and its owner: the disappearance of the “original” Janez Janša and his symbolic function. The multiplication of the name as a signifier leads to the disappearance of the referent, and the aforementioned motto of the party now has to be taken literally; the more individuals called Janez Janša there are, the faster we can achieve the goal of the emptying out of the subject, its de-subjectification and the establishment of the empty signifier. The goal – more or less de-conceptualized, collateral – of the act of changing one's name in this case, then, is to undermine the real ideological, economic, and political power of the owner, and this entails giving up one's own personal, intimate, artistic, or public identity. What is crucial here, then, is the emergent empty space – the void in which the ideological mechanism, as such, is revealed – which can be territorialized by a new political subjectivity.

The change of name as “non-event”, or rather, as an event which does not want (in a manifestative sense) to be one, exploits a certain unintentional, spontaneous action, triggered by the administrative act of renaming. In the “identitarian” sense, the

¹¹ Given that there exist at least seven people with that name, the notion of the original is particularly problematic, but we will not explore it further here. For some productive ideas regarding the relationship between the original and the copy, see Auslander (pp. 121–185).

act becomes an event through the staking of one's own personal history, name, and identity or self-image, through the indication of their disparity. As an event, the act enters the register of contemporary performing arts in the sense of having to do with reality; yet, in the context of institutionalized theory, in the moment when it is carried out by an artist or an actor from the field of contemporary performing arts (the situation is similar to the circumstances created by the appearance of the readymade, that is, by the placement of an object from everyday reality into a gallery space), the act becomes an artistic event or a performative project. On the other hand, however, this act becomes an artistic event also through the concept, which is discernible in the choice of name as the target of the renaming and in the production of the series, which triggers a chain of new meanings, whose radical implications are politically or ideologically subversive.

✎ When talking about the subversive nature of this project, we need to know that the path chosen by its performers is the strategy of subversive affirmation. Subversive affirmation is a tactical procedure, common especially in political activism and artistic media activism, also known as activism.¹² Through affirmation, Inke Arns

¹² In Slovenia, Aldo Milohnić has written extensively about the phenomenon in "Artivism".

and Sylvia Sasse write, "a distance is established from the object of affirmation or its disclosure. With subversive affirmation, excess is always produced, which destabilizes affirmation and turns it into its opposite". The parasitic techniques of subversive affirmation are thus imitation, simulation, mimicry, and camouflage, and they follow the notion that "spectacle can only be undermined by taking it literally". The model or the object

of subversive affirmation is a readymade of sorts, yet, one with which the performer – in the process which Žižek describes as over-identification or excessive identification – identifies excessively, "fanatically", and with an investment that is inversely proportional to the critical distance towards the object (Arns, Sasse, p. 10).

23

In *The Janez Janša Project*, the strategy of subversive affirmation is certainly at work; however, the three Slovenian artists have also added an original dimension. We could first designate their act a subversive re-nomination or de-nomination, with the latter being a more appropriate term, for it implies the object's loss of value. Furthermore, we note that the artists achieve this effect in an almost passive manner, for the plan carries itself out by itself, by producing new meanings solely by appearing spontaneously in the media, with no additional special or planned activities. Since the name change, all three artists have been doing what they have always done, in the same way, and there is no evidence to the contrary; meanwhile their new names, in connection with their actions, produce new meanings. The following is important when considering this conclusion: if we ask ourselves how *The Janez Janša Project* is functioning or where its author is to be situated, we note that it is not to be found in any of the planned activities of the three artists (a plan or a concept can only be detected in their simultaneous decision to change their names into Janez Janša; see also n. 3), but rather in the media attention following their actions.

✎ Thus we can say that there is no stage or auditorium, there is no focused arena or space, where this activist manifesto would take place. We could argue that the

space of the act is the social body of the three artists, their “identitarian” sphere; however, the real space of *The Janez Janša Project* is a non-space, it is only a network of relations and relationships, into which the artists enter in their social and artistic lives. There is no space within; there is only an atmospheric vacuum, which can be assumed by various subjectivities. Thus, The Janez Janša Project is not unfolding in the manner of a performative event or realization, for with this project, for now, we can objectively identify only the moment of its beginning, that is, the moment of the change of name, when the news about three new owners of the name Janez Janša appeared in public (which happened due to media pressure and not at the will of the “performers”). Since then, the event has been in existence, as a permanent performance of sorts, but more precisely as a non-event. The viewer is not observing the performer, as is the case with performance art or body art, nor even his stand-in, as happens in various forms of technological performance; the viewer is watching his media representations.

The media are following the project mostly out of some sort of automatism, in agreement with their stated aim of reporting objectively about various events, including those in which the three artists called Janez Janša appear. It is to the artists’ advantage that the media coverage produces a certain buzz, which the artists might have even counted on and which stems from the undeniable subservience with which the media follow the figure and actions of Janez Janša. However, there have been no noticeable attempts to problematize the artists’ act in the media, and this is the whole point, of course: the act of changing one’s name becomes an event through the production of media

collisions, which are triggered precisely by the appearance of the name Janez Janša in new, completely unexpected contexts, such as “Janša dances in Berlin” (see, for instance, the report in *Delo*, 29th August 2007) or “Is Being Janez Janša an Art Form?” (*Dnevnik*, 28th August 2007). *The Janez Janša Project*, then, exploits the media reality and it enters this reality quite spontaneously and, at first sight, with no subversive intention (or, at least, in a significantly different way from the one deployed by, say, the guerrilla media projects by Joey Skaggs and the Critical Art Ensemble); it only becomes subversive through the collisions brought about by the appearances and actions of the three artists called Janez Janša. In so doing, the project undermines the real as well as the symbolic value of the name and its original owner; on the one hand, it imbues the name with spontaneous and critical irony, and on the other hand, it enables unexpected reactions (uncertainty, outrage, fear) and, perhaps most importantly, it divests the name of its symbolic power to such an extent that – as already suggested – it can offer this newly established void to someone else to fill up with new political ideological content.

✎ The concept of critical distance has proven completely ineffective. In a time governed by the mechanisms of power, that we call biopolitics (Foucault, 2003), it is impossible to be outside; action must start from within. The decision of the three artists, the realization of *The Janez Janša Project*, is indeed coming from within, from an intimate decision, and the change of name as a change of identity – from the artist’s body, so to speak – which is why the project can be understood as a form of body art (Amelia Jones defines manifestations of the self as performance, see *Body*). At the



Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša
 6762260004368526154 (Bank Card), Ljubljana, 2007
 Expiration date: 2009 - 07
 Print on plastic, 5,4 x 8,5 cm
 Inscribed on the back side with black marker: Janša
 Property of Nova Ljubljanska banka, d.d., Ljubljana
 Courtesy: Aksioma

same time, it also reaches to the very core of the ideological system that it subverts by revealing its void; The Janez Janša Project is a “public performance of the obscene phantasmatic core of the ideological structure.” (Žižek, *Why*, p. 40)

Let’s conclude with two pitfalls of *The Janez Janša Project*. First, if the media decided to boycott the coverage of the activities of the three artists called Janez Janša for ideological reasons, the project would probably undergo a factual eclipse, at least in the public eye, for it would continue to operate on a purely intimate level of personal identity, as an invisible performance, and, in this case, the motivation for the project would probably gradually fade out. The second pitfall is the possibility of a planned, “orchestrated” functioning, which would try to run the project from without: this would entail the loss of spontaneity, which is currently driving the project and triggering those unexpected collisions and meanings. However, we have no way of knowing which direction the project will actually take, for it resembles the throw of a dice; we cannot imagine, for instance, what the ramifications of the impending parliamentary election will be for the project, where unplanned media coincidences could produce politically provocative – let’s refrain from predicting fatal – meanings and effects.¹³

The Janez Janša Project is thus, in addition to its physical dimensions, also a media event, or rather, a mediated event par excellence, for it is only through various forms of media representation that the project is fully realised. All three of its

manifestations – that is, the intimate or the identitarian, the public or the politico-

performative, and the media or the mediated manifestation – can be best understood through the lens of contemporary biopolitics.

✎ The frame that the three artists undoubtedly penetrate, through an ostensibly spontaneous performative discourse, with their name change, is biopolitics – the forms of impact of sovereign power on bare life, which we can only observe in passing here. A despotic empire, according to Negri and Hardt, has no exterior; alternatives can only emerge from within where the subject is also situated. According to Agamben, however, the subject lacks voice; it reflects the failure of language and points to the gap between the effable and the ineffable, between the inside and the outside of language, between language as confession and language as archive. The subject is situated at the point of pure contingency of the emergence of language, and the possibility of the non-emergence of language is the basic presupposition of subjectification. The three artists called Janez Janša have thus, with their project, established the name as a form of biopolitical self-representation and, at the same time, as a series, in which their decision is marked less by the assumption of a new identity than by the erasure of the former one and the void of de-subjectification. Their act is an almost bodily sacrifice (if the name is a gift, which is given to us in a religious or civil ceremony, at the christening, the loss or the change of name constitutes its sacrifice), which incurs the loss of the referent and thus the loss of the symbolic value of its “model” or its forerunner in the series; in so doing, if we are entirely consistent, the act – through the use of the tactics of subversive affirmation – opens up a space for a new act, which will fill the void from within. This is not a matter of the aestheticization of

¹³ I am referring to the Slovenian parliamentary election, which is to be called in autumn 2008.

politics, as understood by Rancière, who is aware that “art cannot simply territorialize the space which is left after the political conflict has receded. It must transform the space, at the cost of reconsidering the boundaries of its own politics.” (p. 9) It is also not a matter of the politicization of aesthetics which, according to Rancière, transpires in four different forms: the joke, the collection, the invitation, and mystery. Neither of these can be applied directly to our case, for both the aestheticization of politics and the politicization of aesthetics are marked by a delicate cosmetic contact between signifiers rather than by their rupture or collision in the battlefield of biopolitics.

With its complex investment, the project of the three artists poses the question of ideology; even more, it physically intervenes into it as a collective passive subject (in adopting the strategy of subversive affirmation, the artists have given up the role of the object), for the artists accept the fact that the play or the battle of signifiers will be fought literally on their skin, in the arena of their identities, which were fundamentally marked, even wounded, when they gave up their names. What is most important, however, is the fact that Hrvatin, Grassi, and Kariž a. k. a. Janša, Janša, and Janša offer, in this field, the possibility of political action, which is why our reflection – however protected by shame it may be – seems flawed in its very premise, for all it does is speak about the acts and actions from a safe distance. It is impossible to state clearly how fragile the artists’ bodies are revealed to be in this process, how vulnerable they are and what kinds of scars will be left by the ideology at the heart of this performative act. The playfulness of the project, which many perceive merely as a spur-of-the-moment

idea that counts on media response, is thus only a cover-up, concealing the project’s fundamental ideological subversiveness.

The self is the performance of interiority, a form of biopolitical self-representation. *The Janez Janša Project* undermines the structure of power from within, where it initiates itself through an almost procedural sacrifice and where it persists with extraordinary resistance. It is, however, more-or-less utopian to speak about the project as a genuine political alternative to the current powers-that-be, so what if we, rather, try to understand the project within the field of the politics of representation? *The Janez Janša Project* evades the representational aspect of the phenomenon, even though it falls squarely within the current notion of performativity, both in its “original” Schechnerian sense as well as in all of its new connotative senses, such as those added by Jon McKenzie (*Perform*). *The Janez Janša Project* is staged by reality itself and it is safeguarded by the infallible media attention. As such – to use a modernist expression – it is a *continuous work-in-progress*, an unstable formation, which does not strive for the establishment of its own stability and subjectification; on the contrary, its unconscious purpose is precisely destabilization and de-subjectification.

✎ Yet, this does not exhaust its meanings in the act of performative signification. By producing the series, the re-nomination has triggered another unstoppable process, that is, the process of emptying. However, the latter will be effective only if it is succeeded by a new – artistic, political, ideological – act and not only by the continuation of the series of Janez Janšas ad *infinitum* (although even such a continuation would not be meaningless); it needs to be succeeded

by an insight into the symbolic role of the “original” Janez Janša in the social network, a definition of this traumatic ideological core of the Slovenian society as empty, the emergence of critical positions, even more, the emergence of activist activities, and perhaps even – if we dare to speculate one more time – the emergence of a new political power, a party... In all this, it is, of course not Janez Janša, as a person, that is at stake here, but rather his role in the system that produced him – especially during his tenure as Prime Minister, (this problematic addition to society, as Foucault would say), during the time of the all but complete expansion of the political and ideological power. The strategies of subversive affirmation are not limited to totalitarian or repressive systems, although many of their original types were formed in such systems, but we would hard-pressed to say that they have in any way contributed to their demise or at least to the transition into a new, democratic system, where they could, ironically, become extinct at last. They represented – and they still do – the form of affirmative excommunication that is the subject of Agamben’s discussion; this affirmative excommunication opposes any societal contract which condemns, as Agamben says, “democracy to powerlessness every time we need to confront the problem of sovereign power, and which renders democracy constitutionally incapable of thinking politics outside the framework of the state in the modern era” (Homo, p. 120). Or, in Badiou’s words (The Subject), it is imperative for contemporary responsibility of artistic creation to find a new – third – subjective paradigm, which would not reflect the conflict between one form of power that is experimenting with the limits of pleasure and another form wielding the power of death (sacrifice in the name of an abstract

idea); rather, it would attempt to illuminate the obscurity of political determination by means of artistic determination.

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