

PREMIERE

13 April 2010, Brut Künstlerhaus, Vienna, Austria

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CO-PRODUCTION: Brut Künstlerhaus, Vienna, Austria

IN COLLABORATION WITH: Aksioma, Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana, Slovenia

THANKS: Bojan Arh, Vincente Arlandis, Zdenka Badovinac, Marko Battista, Marko Battista, Simona Benedetti, Airan Berg, Ana Buitrago, dr. Miro Cerar, Heman Cong, María José Cifuentes, Eam Dany, Hafiz Dhaou, France Cukjati, Mladen Dolar, Gurur Ertem, Tim Etchells, Hu Fang, Thomas Frank, Helena Golab, Dante Grassi, Sergio Grassi, Sofia Grassi, Branko Grošelj, Sandra Gómez, Silvana Guliani Grassi, Asja Hrvatini, Ema Hrvatini, Varja Hrvatini, Vito Hrvatini, Vlatka Horvat, Eva Irgl, Ana Ivanek, Janez Janša, Jedrt Jež Furlan, Zmago Jelinčič Plemeniti, Sebastijan Jeretič, Ven Jemeršič, Alenka Jeraj, Mustafa Kaplan, Andrej Kariž, Nuša Kariž, Žiga Kariž, Hoo Koo Cien, Rathany Koh, Sukunthy Koh, Franci Kek, Jela Krečič, Jože Kuhar, Jože Kuhar, Jože Kuhar, Blaž Lukan, Zulkifle Mahmud, Gerald Mayer, Aldo Milohnič, Gabriel Ocina, Marcela Okretič, Matxalen de Pedro, Manuel Pelmus, Victoria Perez, Chat Piersath, Quim Pujol, Miro Petek, Miran Potrč, Franc Pukšič, Igor de Quadra, Vlado Repnik, Ixiar Rozas, Martina Ruhsam, Eszter Salamon, Nicole Schuchard, Ong Keng Sen, Jecko Siompo, Sonja Sivec, Filiz Sizanli, Damir Smrtič, Veso Stojanov, Ashok Sukumaran, Dane Štrkalj, Ilinka Todorovski, Kanitha Tith, Pavel Toplak, Karmen Uglešič, Rok Vevar, Andrej Vizjak, Jasmina Založnik, Pia Wenzel, Nelisiwe Xaba, all interviewed people, as well as Azala (Lasiera Spain), and TheatreWorks (Singapore)

Mladen Dolar

HOW YOU'VE CHANGED, EMIL

1.

Brecht somewhere talks about Hegel, his great Teacher in the matters of the Great Method, i.e., dialectics. He ascribes to him “the abilities of one of the greatest humorists among philosophers”, especially in view of him being particularly interested in how things constantly change into their opposites and can never remain the same. “He contested that one equals one, not only because everything exists inexorably and persistently passes into something else, namely its opposite, but because nothing at all is identical to itself. As any humorist, he was especially interested in what becomes of things. As the Berlin saying goes: ‘My how you’ve changed, Emil!’” (Brecht: *Flüchtlingsgespräche*, GW 14, 1460-2) At this point, the kind publisher provides a footnote, explaining that this is taken from a Berlin joke in which a widow visits the grave of her late husband and addresses his gravestone thusly. It is the par excellence example of dialectics; everything changes. In this case, Emil has changed into a gravestone bearing his name. (Leap of quantity into a new quality?) It was not me who

came up with the name Emil here, it was Brecht who wrote it in reference to this Berlin folktale.

When they changed their names, the three Janez Janšas – especially the one who dialectically ‘is and is not’ Emil – pointed out, among other things, that the change of one’s name carries the connotation of a symbolic death. If you change your name, it is as if you died, as if you experienced your own death in (symbolic) relation to others. Brecht’s anecdote represents the flip side of the matter; the bearer changes, passes away moreover, and disappears, but what remains is precisely his name. No matter how drastically the state of the bearer changes in this alteration, the name remains the same and persists. The name is that which will outlive us; it is more enduring than we are, and it presents our chance at immortality. It will outlive us in the general sense, as inscribed in the symbolic order and thus serves as a reference point for what we might be remembered for, but first in a more banal and directly material sense, such as written on a gravestone, i.e., literally carved in stone. A name is something that imprints our identity into stone and makes it indelible. Names are endowed with a secret plot – a word that also means a family tomb (Hitchcock’s last film was entitled *The Family Plot* and it played precisely on this double meaning of the word) – they have a secret destination, the name being that part of us that will find itself

on our gravestone one day. A name is intended – among other things – to be carved into the gravestone, into the substance of the unchangeable, at least as far as it can be foreseen. It is that part of our identity that is more lasting than we are, written on the supposedly longest-lasting substance of stone. Names are ‘eternal’, but we are not; names last, but we are mortal. The free choice of a name change has its flip side in the non-choice regarding the gravestone, while the context of the ‘symbolic death’ has its flip side in symbolic survival. It symbolically lives its life beyond our lives and pertains to the real of our lives. On the one hand, there is the story in which the bearer is unchanged and can freely change name, without this affecting his or her substance, and on the other hand, there is the story in which the name vindicates itself from beyond the grave, proving to outlast its bearer, who may change his/her substance but not his/her name.

2.

There is a 200-year old French saying: “There is no room for two Napoleons.” It has several variants, for example, “at the top, there is no room for two Napoleons” or “France is not big enough for two Napoleons”. If someone appears claiming to be Napoleon, then this is a clear case of a lunatic

that has to be put in an asylum. Hence the archetypal idea of a lunatic claiming to be Napoleon. And since the name change under consideration does not involve just any name but the name of the prime minister, this saying puts the name change into the following context: is Slovenia big enough not just for two, but for four Napoleons? Should the three excess ones, who zealously claim that they too are Napoleons and can prove this with documents, be put into an asylum? Or is this an “art project”, and thus a modern alternative to the asylum, since in art, supposedly, everything is allowed and even highly socially-valued? Where do they belong, in an asylum or in a gallery?

But the ‘art project’ poses a most ‘real’ question that relates to denomination and domination. The question is not about what qualifies one to bear the name Žiga Kariž for example, but rather what qualifies the one bearing the name, Janez Janša, for example, to occupy the position of power. Wherein lies the connection between a name and power? Is power without a name possible? Is a name not inscribed in power possible? Is there such a thing as a neutral and innocent name? A name is always the bearer of a symbolic mandate and as soon as there appear false pretenders with documents and all, the question is raised about the validity and the justification of the symbolic mandate enabling power.

3.

In Slovenian history, the memory of a time when people en-masse changed their names and assumed new ones is still alive. These were the partisan names that, on the one hand, were based on the tradition of using fictitious names under the circumstances of conspiratorial and illegal activities, covering up ‘real’ identity in order to protect their bearers. But, on the other hand, this rationalization does not explain everything, for, behind the pragmatic justification, there lurks a different desire and will, a desire and a will to found a new symbolic order, a new order of designations and symbolic mandates where the ‘real’ and the symbolic impact no longer lie in the real name, but, on the contrary, in a newly chosen and assumed partisan name; herein lies the real identity, regardless of what it says in the documents. (The revolutionary will of the French Revolution expressed itself in, among other things, a new calendar and the new designations of months, among which the best known is perhaps Brumaire – and Thermidor and Germinal – since the above-mentioned Napoleon assumed power on 18 Brumaire, while Marx immortalized this date in the eponymous essay referring to the other Napoleon, Napoleon’s nephew, who, in the historical farcical repetition, relied precisely on the mandate of his name and its abuse.) As a more



Photo: Janez Janša

direct precedent, one can evoke Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov changing his name to Lenin, Lev Davidovich Bronstein to Trotsky, and Iossif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili to Stalin. The will for a symbolic cut, a cut in the symbolic fabric of society, manifests itself as the will to rename.

The name change of the three Janez Janšas is, in a certain way, inscribed into the tradition of partisan fighting; assuming partisan names, since these new names – three identical ones, in contrast to tradition – in addition to being anchored in the ‘real’ of changing all the documents, also have the effect of founding a parallel symbolic space, a



Photo: Janez Janša

virtual new designation and thus the possibility of a different symbolic relation that violates the delimitation of art, civil status and political mandate. The consistency of this relation is precisely in the disregard of the delimitation of these areas in their punctual coincidence.

The choice of partisan names was not arbitrary; they always carried a symbolic mandate, although they were chosen seemingly only according to the criterion of having no connection to the true name. It is quite astounding that Edvard Kardelj chose Krištof for his partisan name, as it after all carries the whole connotation of St. Christopher,

whose symbolic mission was to carry Christ, hence his name (carrier of Christ) and his iconic representation in innumerable variants with the child Christ on his shoulders. And this is also the function that the bearer of this name dutifully took upon himself. Or that Edvard Kocbek named himself Pavel, with all the connotation of St. Paul. The foundation of assuming a new name has biblical dimensions; it extends to the sources of naming, the authority of giving names. The chosen name is the real name, an inscription into an alternative real symbolic network, in opposition to the arbitrariness of civil identity based on the questionable and spurious authority. The virtual inscription doubles the ordinary inscription and undermines its symbolic power.

From this point of view, the context of a name change is not only the context of a symbolic death, but at the same time the context of a new birth. Its biblical dimension is not accidental, since renaming was often precisely connected with conversion, i.e., with adopting a new religion, with sudden enlightenment and new baptism. The most celebrated example being Cassius Clay, the most famous boxer in history, who named himself Mohamed Ali and thus marked his conversion to Islam. Thus the partisan names also marked a conversion to a new belief and entailed a new birth, a metamorphosis.

The three Janez Janšas' name change caused unease precisely because the three bearers of the new name at no moment wanted to explain their decision and provide the reason for their name change. (But, ultimately, what would be a sufficient reason for any naming?) They did not substantiate or justify the name change with conversion, the adoption of a new belief, the beginning of new life or with the fact that, until then, their lives had been misguided. And the name they had chosen in no way seemed to embody their beliefs, their political sympathies, or to serve as a model of what they wanted to be. Anything but Yet even if we can assume that it perhaps embodies precisely all that they themselves would by no means want to be, they kept completely quiet about it; this was never explicitly formulated. Faced with the probing media, the only explanations they kept providing were 'personal reasons', an intimate personal decision, that is, something that functions as a cloak behind which it is impolite to probe, but at the same time as a cliché excuse, since 'personal reasons' are precisely another name for not wanting to reveal the true reason. The lack of justification for the name change, the fact that it was not accompanied by a conversion to a new faith, the cloning of three identical names that precisely excludes individuality and uniqueness, and, lastly, the choice of a name that does not

borrow from any celebrated and mythical past, but points to the none-too-glorious present, undermining its model by cloning – all this makes it impossible to contextualize this gesture and its message. The gesture obviously has a strong message, but it is not quite clear what this message is supposed to be. And lastly, if – as with partisan names – these name changes evoke the will for a new symbolic mandate and a different foundation, the gesture of a symbolic cut, then this supposedly new symbolic order is manifested here precisely as the cloning of the most notorious name around, that of the bearer of the ruling order. The new is only the gap in the contingency of the old, the sameness of names opens an arbitrary coincidence of the bearer and the name, as if a new version of the Hegelian infinite judgement was at work here, which asserts a direct identity of entities that have no common measure: Janez Janša = Janez Janša = Janez Janša = Janez Janša.

4.

One cannot finish without evoking the best known scene in the entire theatre history, the canonical *locus princeps* of the theatrical tradition, the theatre scene *par excellence*. In the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* Juliet stands on the balcony and speaks into the night, and on the most

famous spot she says: “What’s in a name?”¹ Wouldn’t the rose by any other name smell just as sweet? “O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo? / Deny thy father and refuse thy name.” This is not a question of changing name, but a question of exit from the regime of names as such, the departure from the symbolic places assigned to us by names. But such a way out is not possible, hence the tragedy of the Verona lovers.

The scene pits one against the other – on the one hand, the absolute demand of love and on the other, something one could call the politics of the name. Every name entails a politics. By one’s name one always belongs to a certain social group, a class, a nation, a family, the names pin us down to an origin, a genealogy, a tradition; they classify us and allot us a social place, they distribute social power. By name one is always a Montague or a Capulet (“and I’ll no longer be a Capulet,” says Juliet). By our names we are always inscribed in social antagonisms, they always place us either on the Montague or on the Capulet side.

A name is never individual, it is always generic. By the family name we are always placed under the banner of

1 “What’s in a name? That which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet; / So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d, / Retain that dear perfection which he owes / Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name; / And for that name, which is no part of thee, / Take all myself.” (II, 2, 43-49)

the father's name, the Name of the Father; so with the family name we always carry around psychoanalysis and all its luggage. But also the given name is never personal, it is inscribed into a code; in our civilization it is precisely the 'Christian name', traditionally given according to the date of birth and its patron saint, based on a ramified classification of saintly distribution. Or else excluded from it – Ivan Cankar's remarkable short story *Polikarp*, just a hundred years old, tells the story of a man who was given the curious name of Polikarp at birth, in order to stigmatize him as a child born out of wedlock, as a bastard. He was made to carry that name as mark of Cain; the name defined his fate from the outset. Although the codes today are more blurred, elusive and loose, seemingly liberal, they still very much exist and continue to secretly delineate us.

In the balcony scene, love appears as that which should entail leaving behind all these social codes. The tragedy of the Veronese lovers stems from the stark opposition between name and being, that unique human being which is supposed to be beyond naming and which should enable establishing a bond apart from names. And therein lies the gist of their tragedy, the name has nevertheless affected their being and taken revenge; they couldn't overcome the way they were marked by their proper names. It turned out

that Romeo, by his name, had a different smell, and that was the smell of death.

So would Emil Hrvatin by the name Janez Janša smell just the same? By no means.

We thank the author for kindly allowing the publication of his text

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Chain of Events