

**SMUGGLING
ANTHOLOGIES
READER**

SMUGGLING



[71] Janša, Janša and Janša: *Work*,
exhibition view, Rijeka, 2013.

Vana Gović

Janša?

Interview with Janez Janša,
Janez Janša, Janez Janša

In 2007, three artists; Davide Grassi, Emil Hrvatin and Žiga Kariž, took the name of Janez Janša, who at the time was Slovenia's PM and the president of the Slovenian Democratic Party. This act has produced numerous effects on personal lives of three artists, on public and political sphere, and on the concept of art in general. By changing their names, these three artists have let art to occupy their lives permanently, but also the lives of those who get in touch with them. Since then, art has been functioning along the same principles as life itself. Accordingly, art has become as unpredictable as life itself. Their exhibition titled *Work*, hosted at the end of 2013 by Rijeka's Mali salon gallery as a part of *Smuggling Anthologies* project, has served as a motivation for our talk with the artists Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša.¹

You decided to call the Mali salon exhibition *Work*, introducing it by the words: "For us, there is no difference between our work, our art and our lives; in that sense, we are not different from you".² Can you explain in what way you treat your work, art and life as one?

J. J.: One of the basic features of neoliberalism is the removal of distinction between

work and free time. Post-fordism, cognitive capitalism, non-material work are the phenomena by which we say that it is not the notion of work that has changed, but life itself has turned into nothing than mere work.

J. J.: It is best shown by what present-day companies require from their workers. It seems that the companies adopt the lifestyle of artists: today's workforce has to be flexible, always at hand, full of ideas and energy; it has to be sociable, it has to love its job and to be highly motivated, always to wear a smile and never to stop working. Who else but an artist has exactly these qualities?

J. J.: Yes, when artists attend an opening of an exhibition or an after-party, they actually work. They broaden their horizons, hoping to leave an impression on a curator, producer, critic, or a minister... A freelancer's work has certainly become a non-stop audition for getting new jobs.

J. J.: We decided to title our exhibition *Work* because it mainly displays works from our everyday lives. We haven't had any influence on most of these works – they have developed themselves, as a collateral effect of our name change. Even when we haven't worked in the strictest sense, life has been "working" for us.

1 Janez Janša is a Slovenian politician who was Prime Minister of Slovenia from 2004 to 2008 and again from 2012 to 2013. He has led the Slovenian Democratic Party since 1993. Janša was Minister of Defense from 1990 to 1994, holding that post during the Slovenian War of Independence (June–July 1991). On June 5, 2013 the District Court in Ljubljana convicted Janez Janša of corruption and sentenced him to two years in prison.
2 The statement is cited from the letter, sent by the three artists to the Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Janša in 2007, notifying him of their name changes. The letter is now part of art documentation by Janša, Janša and Janša.

J. J.: We also included a small word-play. In the Croatian language, the same word, “work” denotes both work as a process and work as a piece of art, and each piece of art is always a product of work. We decided to use the singular form of “work” (instead of “works”, which is normally used in exhibitions) because the exhibited works portray work as a process. The exhibited “work” is actually consisted of a number of our life situations produced by the name change (for instance, people meeting us at airports carrying the sign “Janez Janša”).

In 2007 you changed your names into Janez Janša, the former Slovene PM and the president of the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS). It was an intimate act that highly affected your lives and work. What was the motivation for such an act? Did you see it as an effective way to influence the existing political symbols or did you, through your personal experience, try to re-examine different aspects of “possessing” a name?

J. J.: For me, name change is a personal act so I do not want to discuss it in public.

J. J.: I agree with my colleague. Your question offers potential answers that we have come across multiple times. A name is a mediator, an interface; it is our mode of entering the community. In a certain way, our name belongs to the community more than it belongs to us. A name is something that is given to us and it takes a certain amount of time in our lives to get used to it. Our personal names are a lot more frequently used by others than by us, even though we are the possessors. A name change can be compared to death: it affects those who remain living much more than those who died. In a similar manner, the community has a lot more difficulties in accepting someone’s new name.

J. J.: Shakespeare’s Juliet in the famous balcony monologue laments on what it is in a name, claiming that that which we call a

rose would smell as sweet by any other name. When we were working on the play *The more there is of us, the faster we reach the finish line*, we were wondering if a rose would smell the same by the name of Janez Janša.

ART DOES NOT OFFER ANSWERS, BUT POSES GOOD QUESTIONS

Subversive affirmation and excessive identification are frequently mentioned as the most efficient ways of affecting the system that is able to absorb every kind of criticism and resistance. To what extent is it right to talk about your work in terms of Subversive affirmation and excessive identification, notions that imply socially engaged art?

J. J.: We are familiar with such interpretations. In a certain way, many people wanted to see more theatricality, more identification, parody... Radical, left-oriented critics (Marina Gržinić, for instance) wanted us to confront directly with Janša the politician.

J. J.: Subversive affirmation is known for its ability to act in all domains. One of the key questions posed to us was whether the change of name was politically motivated and whether it serves to support the politician or to criticize him. An act of subversive affirmation evokes precisely such questions, and the one who asks the questions has to live with them and find the answer themselves.

J. J.: We see art and society as a dynamic sphere of rational and efficient individuals. In that sense, each person articulates their position in society and reflects social relations that he or she creates. It is not a task of art to provide answers, or to fascinate or guide people. On the contrary, the ability to pose good questions is something that separates art from religion.

Your latest works *Troika* and *Credits* are the result of a fruitful cooperation between two different systems: a

museum and a bank. They can be held up as examples of how such stern practices can be made flexible. Do you see art as a place of reconciling the irreconcilable and changing the unchangeable?

J. J.: Museums and banks do have something in common: they keep artworks and money and they raise value of artworks and money.

J. J.: Yes, if they handle the artworks and the money in a proper way :-)

J. J.: The Museum of Modern Art and the Museum of Contemporary Art in Ljubljana wanted to include our personal identity cards in their collection. They sent an official request to the Ministry of the Interior, the issuer of the ID cards whose owner is the state, to allow them to buy the work. The Ministry rejected their request so the Museum has sent the same request to the Ministry of Culture. They are waiting for the response.

J. J.: Our relationship to institutions is not motivated by criticism. It is motivated by a desire for collaboration. Thanks to their position in society, institutions can produce something that cannot be produced from the position of an artist.

J. J.: There is no such thing as the irreconcilable and the unchangeable. Everything that is solid and entrenched turns to smoke.

THE PARADOX OF THE AUTONOMY OF ART

The previously mentioned identity cards materialize the connection between two worlds. Like most works that you exhibit, they are official documents and relics of art at the same time. What are the effects of such a broad understanding of a piece of art? Has art silently, but completely, took over life?

J. J.: The thing is that the same item has two different functions (identity document and

a work of art) and that different institutions and different government bodies stand behind these functions. In such a situation, two different fields collide with each other and freedom of artistic expression becomes clearly limited. In simple words, if the Ministry of the Interior allowed the sale of official documents, it would set a precedent, which could be used as a reference in other, not so innocent, situations. In the same way, could we talk about freedom of artistic expression if the Interior Ministry was allowed to intervene in the field of art?

J. J.: We are not interested in who is stronger because we know that artistic value lies precisely in this duality, that the item is an identification document and a piece of art at the same time.

J. J.: The autonomy of art is a paradox; on the one hand it reduces the possibility that a power holder's affects the work of art, but on the other hand, the effect of art on society is weaker because of that.

J. J.: We produce art with an expiry date. When an identity card expires, when it is no longer valid, it becomes merely a document about a situation from the past, an empty item of memory. It will be replaced by a new identity document and, which will also be an inseparable part of artistic work, until it expires too.

Your work is based on official and regular means of communication with the governmental, economic and cultural institutions, and the product is collateral art. Can you describe your perception of collateral art?

J. J.: I will follow up on what I have just said. The new identification document, as an integral part of a new work of art will not be produced on our own accord, nor will it be created by one of us or by a cultural production institution. No, it will be created by the state, i.e., the Interior Ministry. In that sense, whether we like it or not, they will produce a new piece of art for us. And that's not all: they will give it a name, too.

J. J.: Collateral art is a practice in which works of art are created as an effect of specific social circumstances (change of name, in our case). It develops independently of the work of an artist or a cultural milieu.

J. J.: Effects of collateral art spread independently of its activity. Jela Krečič, the journalist of *Delo*, says that when she writes about our work, she feels like a collaborator in our work – each appearance of Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša in the media is a collateral effect of their work.

J. J.: But the media have also jumped on the new situation following the change of our names. The political weekly *Mag* interviewed us, instead of the politician, who had refused to be interviewed. *Dnevnik* published the news that one of us will run against Janša in the next government elections. Probably one of the best examples of journalism as a collateral effect of the name change was a column written in 2007 by Boris Dežulović. Dežulović titled it *Is Janez Janša a Jerk?* and signed it by the name of Ivo Sanader.³

COURT PROCEDURE AS A PERFORMANCE, PARLAMENT AS A THEATRE

In these times of biopolitics, when political and economic system engages in the lives of individual people in so many ways, you hit back and, as individual people, you engage in the system.

To what extent has such behavior changed your personal freedom?

J. J.: The author of the book *Janez Janša, Biografija*, Marcel Štefančič Jr., the well-known film critic and political commentator, believes that politicians differ from each other according to how much they want to interfere into other people's lives. Some decide to interfere only a little, while others interfere a lot. In Štefančič's opinion, Janša the politician has decided to interfere a lot. Therefore, Štefančič concludes that there is nothing left for us to do but to interfere in his life too.

J. J.: This is an interesting interpretation, but I think it is not so important in our work. Another journalist noted it is funny that a prime minister in political and public life uses the name that is not his legal name (his legal name is Ivan Janša). Nevertheless, he has to use his real, legal name when he appears before the court. Personally, we don't care what politicians do with their names. We explore the position that an institution has in the whole society. Speaking in the words of art, justice system operates in the field of facts, by which it comes close to performance, while governments and parliaments create fictional frames for actions of reality (laws are nothing else but a display of how life and reality work, display of limits imposed by power-holders), which makes them much more similar to theatre.

³ Ivo Sanader was the Prime Minister of Croatia from 2003 to 2009. In 2007, when the article was written, Sanader was in conflict with the Slovenian Prime Minister, Janez Janša, over Slovenian objections to Croatian legislative adaptation regarding the mutual border-line before Croatia entering the European Union. During the time, newspapers reported on political espionage from Slovenian side. Obstacles weren't solved while Sanader was in charge.

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