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**JANEZ JANŠA**  
**and**  
**Beyond**

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# **Janez Janša and Beyond**



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**WHAT'S  
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NAME?**

It all began with Plato. The question of naming, of name calling, of the aptitude or ineptitude of names, their appropriate or inadequate nature, their capacity to hit the mark, their reference, their multitude, their force to evoke the thing, the impossibility to be disentangled from the thing – it all began with Plato, that is, with a singular name condensing the origin of so many of our concepts and our ways of thinking. There is already a certain paradox in this, involving this illustrious name, for philosophy in its endeavor towards conceptuality and universality, its striving for ideas, notions, theories, pure thought, ultimately hinges on a dozen, or two dozen, proper names forming the knots, pinning the universal to the most singular. Plato prominently features as the founding name to which a long string of concepts can be attached, providing them an anchorage in a name.

Plato's dialogue *Cratylus*, with the subtitle "On the correctness of names," represents the first time in history that the question is seriously raised: What's in a name? A couple of millennia before Juliet, Socrates meets Cratylus and Hermogenes on a street in Athens, and Socrates is called upon to unravel this mystery, to intervene into the already ongoing discussion. Hermogenes maintained that names are based on a convention, an agreement of a community of speakers, and whatever the arbitrary agreement may be, it is the sole foundation of proper naming.<sup>1</sup> Cratylus, on the other hand, maintained that names must ultimately be based in nature, so that there would have to be a tie, an umbilical cord that attaches the names to the things named. Can it be that names are just arbitrary? Are some names better than others to designate the thing named? Can the names be true or false, and how is one to discriminate the one from the other? How do they refer to things? The specter of Juliet on the balcony is already there: Would the rose by any other name smell as sweet? Does the name affect its smell,

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1 "No name belongs to a particular thing by nature, but only because of the rules and usage of those who establish the usage and call it by that name." (384d) I am using Plato's *Complete Works*, ed. John M. Cooper, Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.

or is it completely indifferent to it, or does its sweet smell affect the name and is it propelled by it? How do names smell?

Socrates, who is called in as a referee, first firmly establishes that there is a divide between true and false speech, and that names, being parts of speech, must also partake in this divide, that they cannot be simply indifferent, that there are ultimately true and false names. Furthermore, there must be an essence to things which the names must spell out<sup>2</sup> – things have their independent essence and names must in some way be dependent on this independent essence, although this essence, being completely independent, cannot be quite affected by the ways in which we happen to call things, but it is nevertheless not unrelated. Names are like tools that we need to get to this essence, and there can be tools which are more or less appropriate, and hence have a varying degree of truth or falsity. But these tools are not quite freely ours to choose, or to select better ones from, for the names are always given by some Other, the rule-setter, the lawgiver, the name-maker (389a), whose status escapes us. The names precede us. They are transmitted from generation to generation, and if one is to surmise about their origin and the beginning of the chain, then one would have to imagine some divine source, beyond the capacity of humans simply agreeing upon conventions – names are never quite just a matter of consensus. The Other is there in the name, the instance of nomination beyond our reach, an instance which must have always already made the foundational gesture of naming back in time immemorial. When, in the biblical myth, Adam, the first man, named the animals, this didn't pertain to divine jurisdiction, but to human invention. Yet, the foundational Word was already there, outside of human range.

The supposed divine legislator is inscrutable, so one is always in a position to scrutinize the inscrutable, trying to disentangle his motives

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2 “Things have some fixed being or essence of their own. They are not in relation to us and are not made to fluctuate by how they appear to us. They are by themselves, in relation to their own being or essence, which is theirs by nature.” (386d–e)



and assess the value of the names. “It’s the work of a rule-setter, it seems, to make a name. And if names are to be given well, a dialectician must supervise him.” (390d) So we need dialectics to gauge and evaluate the names; they have to be examined to see their possible foundation and their aptitude to spell out the essence of things.

If names had been given by some divine instance, by gods, where does the name for gods come from? Why are gods called gods, “*theoi*”? “It seems to me that the first inhabitants of Greece believed only in those gods in which many foreigners still believe today – the sun, moon, earth, stars, and sky. And, seeing that these were always moving or running, they gave them the name ‘*theoi*,’ because it was their nature to run (*thein*).” (397b) So we are a bit bemused to learn that “gods” come from “running,” on the rather flimsy evidence that the two words happen to sound alike. And why are men called men, “*anthropoid*”? “The name ‘human’ signifies that the other animals do not investigate or reason about anything they see, nor do they observe anything closely. But a human being, no sooner sees something – that is to say, ‘*opōpe*’ – than he observes it closely and reasons about it. Hence human beings alone among the animals are correctly named ‘*anthrōpos*’ – one who observes closely what he has seen (*anathrōn ha opōpe*).” (399c) What about the soul, “*psuchē*”? It is what gives breath and revitalizes (*anapsuchon*) the body. What about the body? “Some people say that the body (*sōma*) is the tomb (*sēma*) of the soul, on the grounds that it is entombed in its present life, while others say that it is correctly called ‘a sign’ (*sēma*) because the soul signifies whatever it wants to signify by means of the body.” (400c) So the body is at the crossroads between the tomb and the sign. What about love? “‘*Erōs*’ (erotic love) is so called because it flows in from outside, that is to say, the flow doesn’t belong to the person who has it, but is introduced into him through his eyes. Because of this it was called ‘*esros*’ (influx) in ancient times ...” (420a–b) What about truth? “‘*Alētheia*’ (truth) is like some other names being compressed, for the divine motion of being is called ‘*alētheia*’ because it is a compressed

form of the phrase ‘a wandering that is divine (*alē theia*).’” (421b) So truth is like a divine drift, a divine straying – gods running a bit amok? And so on, and so on, for all the 130 or so etymologies, one fancier than the other, all proving that names are founded in some way, that they depict the thing they name, that they are in some manner like the thing they refer to, showing a certain fidelity to some of its key features, that they are always evocative, that there is no such thing as a neutral name.<sup>3</sup>

But the suggestions that Socrates proposes (and can he really mean all this?) are based on etymologies. The names are like compounds whose elements are already meaningful in themselves. The semantic value of a name is supported by the semantic value of another name, so that ultimately we are moving in a circle. If gods, *theoi*, comes from *thein*, running, where does *thein* come from? The origin seems to be on the run, running through the tight web of words, each one evoking others, sounding alike, but not just sounding alike, since the sound echo that reverberates among words coincides with the semantic echo. The similar sounds evoke similar meanings, they point in the direction of meaning which cannot be disentangled from the sound. Sounds are never quite arbitrary in relation to meaning; meaning is not indifferent to the sounds that happen to carry it – it runs with them.

But eventually one would have to consider the elements which are in themselves not semantic, like singular sounds, letters, phonemes, syllables, the components which form the building blocks of words and all semantic units. Would we thus arrive at something that is purely arbitrary? No way.

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3 Sometimes it's a bit tough and one needs a lot of exertion and cunning to find the connection, e.g. for *technē*, art or craft: “If you remove the ‘*t*’ and insert an ‘*o*’ between the ‘*ch*’ and the ‘*n*’ and the ‘*ē*’ [thus obtaining *echonoē*], doesn't it signify the possession of understanding (*hexis nou*)?” (414b) Hmm – does it? If you remove some letters and insert some others, couldn't one prove just about anything? Where does this chain of associations stop? What is it based on? What does it prove? Is Plato pulling our leg?

“Don’t you think that just as each thing has a color or some of those other qualities we mentioned, it also has a being or essence? Indeed, don’t color and sound each have a being or essence, just like every other thing that we say ‘is’? ... So if someone were able to imitate in letters and syllables this being or essence that each thing has, wouldn’t he express what each thing itself is?” (423e)

So letters, sounds, and syllables could be like color and sound, evoking the thing, but expressing it better, not merely by its qualities, but by spelling out its essence. Colors and sounds have their craftsmen, the painter and the musician, and the craftsman that we are investigating is “the namer ... the one we have been looking for from the beginning.” (424a) Can we name the namer? The name has to have a mimetic quality; it has to be like the thing, but also it has to pertain to logos, to the capacity of naming in such a way so as to spell out and express the essence. Letters (and phonemes) are the elements required for such a depiction – but why those? For instance “r” (*rho*):

“The letter ‘r’ seemed to the name-giver to be a beautiful tool for copying motion, at any rate he often uses it for this purpose. He first uses this letter to imitate motion in the names ‘*rhein*’ (‘flowing’) and ‘*rhoē*’ (‘flow’) themselves. Then in ‘*tromos*’ (‘trembling’) and ‘*trechein*’ (‘running’), and in such verbs as ‘*krouein*’ (‘striking’), ‘*thrauein*’ (‘crushing’), ‘*ereikein*’ (‘rending’), ‘*thruptein*’ (‘breaking’), ‘*kermatizein*’ (‘crumbling’), ‘*rhumbein*’ (‘whirling’), it is mostly ‘r’ he uses to imitate these motions.” (426d–e)

So there is no lack of evidence; words start flocking and mushrooming the moment one considers the evocative nature of, say, “r”<sup>4</sup>

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4 Derrida will make a big case, in *Glas* (Paris: Galilée, 1974), of the compound “gl” and its

Words are like pictures of things, and if this analogy is to be carried further, then a picture depicts things by using colors that are similar to the colors of those things, and in the same way the elements of speech must bear similarity to what they depict. “Then by the same token can names ever be like anything unless the things they’re composed out of have some kind of likeness to the things they imitate? And aren’t they composed of letters or elements?” (434b) Names are like imitations of things, their images, notwithstanding their lack of imagery, and if there can be better and less good pictures, by the criterion of likeness and the capacity to conjure the thing they imitate, so can there be more or less appropriate names. Yet, there can be no perfect picture, since the perfect picture would be the double of the original; one couldn’t tell them apart.

“An image cannot remain an image if it presents all the details of what it represents. . . . Would there be two things – Cratylus and an image of Cratylus – in the following circumstances? Suppose some god didn’t just represent your color and shape the way painters do, but made all the inner parts like yours, with the same warmth and softness, and put motion, soul, and wisdom like yours into them – in a word, suppose he made a duplicate of everything you have and put it beside you. Would there then be two Cratyluses or Cratylus and an image of Cratylus?” (432b–c)

The specter of two Cratyluses appears, a picture so perfect that one cannot tell it apart from the original, the perfect double. The world

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particular nature of “glue” (featuring also in *Glas* of the title), taking cue also from *Cratylus*, where Socrates expounds at some length on the nature of “l” and its smoothness and softness, combined with “g” (as in “*glischron*,” “gluey”), “in which the gliding of the tongue is stopped by the power of the ‘g.’” (427b) Consider the case of *Google*, to extend Socrates’s method to modern times, and its nature of glue.

inhabited by doubles would be uninhabitable, the world invaded by duplicates that one couldn't discern in relation to the original, the world of an art so perfect that it would redouble this world with its own images. But only god could supposedly be such an artist – or is it that even the weak human art, with all its flaws, nevertheless has the power of blurring the lines, infringing upon the real world of which it is but an image? Is this why Plato was so apprehensive and worried about art, to the point that he wanted to expel artists from the city? Once one engages on the path of replicas, even faulty ones, there is no stopping, for even the bad ones still possess the magic power of striking back at the original.

“At any rate, Cratylus, names would have an absurd effect on the things they name, if they resembled them in every respect, since all of them would then be duplicated, and no one would be able to say which was the thing and which was the name.”  
(432d)

Here we are. If there is a spot in classical philosophy where the project of the three Janšas is inscribed and anticipated, then it is this one. There is this passage in Plato which has been lying low for 2,500 years, secretly waiting for this project to emerge. We have it all there: names are imperfect images, for if they were to be perfect, then they would effectively redouble things. We would be faced with a double world where the mere name would be a perfect replica, and several entities bearing the same name would strike back at the original bearer of the name to the point that one couldn't be sure which is which. The project comes with a twist, though: if one cannot turn the name into the perfect replica of the thing, one can make the perfect replica of the name itself; the name can be cloned, so even if the name is an imperfect image, its tenuous and tenacious connection with the bearer is such that it clones the bearer. The one and only Janez Janša is, by the mere

cunning of the name, multiplied by three more Janšas with the threat of becoming indistinguishable.<sup>5</sup> Cloning the name blurs the lines; there is more in the name than a mere conventional marker.

Of course names are not perfect images and to imagine the universal reduplication would be an absurdity and a nightmare, but even in their imperfect rendering they nevertheless produce effects on the entities they name, hence Plato's struggle for the correctness of names and their proper foundation. In order to be a suitable name it has to involve a structural similarity to what it names, yet this similarity also involves a danger and threatens with confusion. Since Plato himself amply uses the analogy between naming and painting, one can refer to the way that he insisted on the perils of painting in Book Ten of the *Republic*: painting is merely the production of copies, actually of copies of copies, since the things of which one makes copies are already copies of ideas, but this is nevertheless dangerous. There is a mystery pertaining to all this: copies of copies – why the fuss? Why would such a slight thing as a copy of a copy cause so much concern and passion, even rage? Why would a doubling create peril? If copies and imitations have no proper reality, or a reality so much slimmer and dimmer than the real thing, why worry?<sup>6</sup>

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5 If I were to try my own hand at the name Janša with the Socratic method of fancy etymologies, then, in the vein of Antiquity, the most prominent candidate for this would no doubt be Janus, the double-faced Roman deity of beginnings and transitions, the god of doors and passages, displaying a different face on either side. Is there a similarity by which the name Janša resembles its bearer? Here we have it, the double-faced entity, displaying on the one hand the face of an orthodox communist functionary and on the other the dissident put in prison for subversive activities by the old regime; then the face of the prime minister and the leader of the right wing, and the face of the corrupt politician brought to court by the new regime; the national hero and the demagogic trouble monger. And above all, an entity of transition. Is this then an appropriate well-founded name in the Socratic vein?

6 Lacan considers this for a moment in *Seminar XI*: “[The story of Zeuxis and Parrasios] shows us why Plato raises against the illusion of painting. The problem is not that painting is an illusory equivalent of the object, although Plato seems to be saying this. ... Painting doesn't compete with the appearance, it competes with what Plato shows us beyond the appearance as the Idea. Precisely because painting is the appearance which tells that it is what creates appearances, Plato raises against painting as an activity competing with his own.” (*Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse*, Paris: Seuil, 1973, p. 103)

Why lose all this time and temper over something so minor, negligible and even contemptible? The trouble is that the copy, the imitation, has the strange power to affect the thing itself. Imitation strikes back; it impinges on the original; it has an impact on it. One makes a copy, not even that, a copy of a copy, and the world of ideas seems to be shattered; it has to be firmly defended against any such intrusion. Imitators can do more harm than they can possibly imagine; they can cause havoc by merely replicating; they can disturb the order of eternal ideas by making replicas of their replicas. Just as the sophists, those specialists in imitation, can undermine the true philosophy by merely mimicking it. Ultimately, Plato's fear was not that the copy, the imitation, the mimetic double, was but a pale and unworthy shadow of the real thing. His fear was that it was too close to the real thing, not separated enough from it, tied to it by an invisible thread that cannot be cut, the umbilical cord tying it to its supposed model; hence the model itself couldn't be cut loose from it. The danger is that they are so much alike that a supposed "naïve observer" could easily mistake the one for the other.

By analogy, the same goes for names. The name may well be an imperfect image, but it is nevertheless too much of an image. The peril of the reverse effect is always there. It can undermine the reference and stain the entity it refers to. And what the Janšas have done is quite Platonic: if the name is to be considered as a pale copy of the thing named, they have done the copy of the copy, actually three copies of the copy. And if in painting the copy of the copy is always deficient in its rendering, then they have managed the remarkable feat of making the perfect copies of the copy, for the name can actually be fully replicated in all its facets, to the point of being indistinguishable. Should Cratylus have a perfect name, there would be two Cratyluses. What better name could one come up with than the precise double of the thing; but redoubling and multiplying the name conversely evokes the specter of four Janez Janšas.<sup>7</sup>

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7 When the name change occurred in 2007, the three artists changed their Wikipedia entries, and

The artists' project was Platonic in its assumptions, and so was the reaction. Janša's party, SDS (Slovene Democratic Party), was highly disconcerted by this move. It showed a lot of annoyance and issued a number of dismissive and rather enraged remarks. Why would they fear the copies of the copy? No doubt they shared Plato's concerns, assuming that the name in some way affects the original, that it spells out its key features, so that there can be no neutral naming, and the multiplied names carried in themselves the features spelling out the essence, namely the Janšeity, which was hijacked by the mere multiple use of the name. Each Janez Janša was, by the name, endowed with the unfathomable essence of Janšeity. Even more, this essence cannot be quite spelled out by any positive traits. It is only attached to the name. There is no other way of getting to it, so the use of the name dispossessed its original bearer of his singularity, his uniqueness, his ineffable being. The unease and the rage witness that Platonism is alive and well in today's Slovenia, and SDS should be praised for subscribing to the ideas of Antiquity.

Let me say a few more things on *Cratylus*. Socrates is well aware of the traps involved in names, so his concern is ultimately not the proper foundations of naming in etymological twists and somersaults, but rather in getting to the proper foundations by bypassing names altogether.

“But since there is a civil war among names, with some claiming that they are like the truth and other claiming that *they* are, how then are we to judge between them, and what are we to start from? We can't start from other different names because there are none. No, it's clear we'll have to look for something other than names, something that will make plain to us without using names which of these two kinds of names are the true ones – that is to say, the ones that express the truth

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the first thing that our oracle Wikipedia came up with was disambiguation. Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janez\\_Janša](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janez_Janša) (disambiguation).



about the things that are. ... But if that's right, Cratylus, then it seems it must be possible to learn about the things that are, independently of names." (438d–e)

So this is Socrates's dream, his ultimate aim: a direct access to things without the roundabout of names, a knowledge that could read things properly and adequately without this always deficient instrument of naming, involving distortion and bias, the infinite slide of sounds and meanings. Only on the basis of this clear capture of the essence independently of naming can we then judge what names are appropriate or not, lay down weapons, and sign truce in this civil war of names. The proper knowledge would be the direct access to the nameless thing, without any use of names which are but intruders, the short-circuit between our mind and the essence which would get straight to the logos of things themselves without the logos of words – but doesn't logos essentially mean "the word"? Can one get to the nameless word beyond all words without any words? And how could one testify to it without the words with which we are stuck? Socrates seems to shake hands with Juliet, who strives for love as the direct access to her beloved without the by-pass of the name. "Tis but thy name that is my enemy," says Juliet, believing that one should get out of the regime of names to get to the pure love. But can one ever?

At the background of this silent and impossible enterprise as the ultimate goal, there is the glittering beauty of this dialogue, the beauty of endless punning, the endless wordplay, the endless poetry of words echoing other words, of reverberations of sounds and the concomitant reverberations of meanings.<sup>8</sup> From *Cratylus* to *Finnegans Wake*, there is but a step. This all may be fanciful and far-fetched, and there have

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<sup>8</sup> "Hesitation between sound and meaning," this is how Roman Jakobson defined poetry, following Paul Valéry. What better testimony to this definition than *Cratylus*, despite and because of its epistemic endeavor which tries to disentangle the two, to get to the purity and univocity of meaning by means of the impurity and plurivocity of sounds.

been many ruminations about the status of this long exercise – could Socrates, and Plato with him, possibly be serious? Yet, at the bottom of it there is the insight that this entanglement of sounds and meanings presents the real of the name, the way that names refer to things quite apart from, and on the top of, the usual univocal designation. Synonymy, with multiple different words meaning the same, presupposes the univocity and unicity of meaning that can be expressed by various means. Homonymy, with the different words sounding contingently alike, presupposes the dispersal of meaning, its dissemination. The paradox of *Cratylus* is that it tries to pin down the univocal and unitary meaning by means of homonymy, by the erratic nature of language which unpredictably lends itself to chance encounters. Episteme meets poetics, and the demarcation line is blurred. Naming hinges on puns and homonyms, the erratic side of logos that cannot be dissociated from its clear-cut side of straight meaning. And if I go out on a limb – so does the Freudian unconscious, always using puns and homonyms to pave the way to its coming out and convey its erratic truth. There is a real of language that emerges in the midst of this, quite beyond its capacity to convey sense.

Of course we the moderns swear by Saussure, firmly believing that names, as all signs, are arbitrary and that any foundation of names in similarity is complete nonsense, fomenting fantasies that have no linguistic or epistemological value. Yet, can there ever be a word, a sign, an utterance, that we could simply take as arbitrary, with no other value than that? Isn't it rather that we are all profoundly Cratylian at heart, that words contingently connect, secretly correspond and form echoes, that they constantly produce fantasies by their sounds, that any sign or word, as arbitrary as it may be, ceases to be just arbitrary the moment we use it? And even if we officially agree with Hermogenes that names are just conventions, established by usage, this is not a view that we can ever espouse in our inner beliefs, dreams, and desires. Names evoke, and what they evoke is not quite what they name. If the

fancy foundations of names seem fantastic, then it is equally fantastic to assume that we will ever be able to reduce names to their reference. Names have their own power, and what the Janšas' project displays is this strange power, suspended between reference, evocation, desire, social fabric, and by their power they have the capacity to stir the network of power as such.

Cratylus, as the story goes, was allegedly Plato's first teacher of philosophy, his master, before he found his second and ultimate teacher in Socrates. So in this dialogue we have, like a condensation, Plato's two masters confronting each other and entering into a philosophical dispute, with Socrates duly taking the upper hand. But this is not the last of Cratylus. It seems that Cratylus, in his own way, has followed Socrates's advice of silently getting to the essence of things independent of names, giving up on names altogether. We can read the following subsequent testimony in Aristotle:

“Because they saw that all this world of nature is in movement, and that about that which changes no true statement can be made, they said that of course, regarding that which everywhere in every respect is changing, nothing could truly be affirmed. This belief that blossomed into the most extreme of the views ... was held by Cratylus, who finally did not think it right to say anything but only moved his finger, and criticized Heraclitus for saying that it is impossible to step twice into the same river; for he thought one could not do it even once.”  
*(Metaphysics, Book 4, 1010a)*<sup>9</sup>

So there we have the extreme edge of philosophy, the sheer impossibility to say anything, the reduction of philosophy to merely moving a finger in silence, the ultimate gesture beyond the traps of logos and

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9 I am using *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, New York: Random House, 2001.

names. Moving a finger for merely pointing at things that one cannot name? Or is it rather the universally understandable gesture of raising the middle finger? Perhaps, in the Janšas' project, one should combine the two strategies: that of replicating the name and thus aiming at virtually replicating the bearer, and Cratylus's silent gesture of the middle finger.

Plato doesn't differentiate between proper names and common names. For him it's all the same whether we discuss the provenance and the aptitude of proper names such as Athena, Apollo, Hector, Astyanax, Janša, or common names such as truth, man, body, soul, knowledge, etc. The problem of the proper foundation of a name is the same. But this is not how this problem has generally been treated in linguistics and the philosophy of language, ancient or modern. It is obvious that common names can have vocabulary definitions which explain the meaning of a word by the properties of the entity it refers to, so that every word can be accounted for in terms of the traits that define its essential features. Every common name can be explained by a bunch of other common names, spelling out the characteristics that determine its meaning.<sup>10</sup> It is not quite so with proper names, or at least they present a special case. The first thing one can say is that they are not defined by common properties alone. One has to add some unique properties which single out its referent in its singularity, say the date and place of birth, profession, and achievements. Yet these singular features that pertain exclusively to the bearer of the name and to no other person or entity don't quite behave in the same way as do the common features defining common names. If the name "dog" refers to a set of properties that define that animal's particular nature, distinguishing it from other animals, thus delimiting the particular essence of the dog, say its "dogeity," which makes a dog a dog, then the name Fido, referring to this singular dog bearing that name, doesn't define its "fidoity" – there

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**10** A haphazard example from the net: "truth: the real facts about something; the things that are true; the quality or state of being true; a statement or idea that is true or accepted as true." This already displays the problem of all definitions being ultimately circular.

is no essence to this name, apart from the contingent act of nomination performed by its owner. Nor does the dog Fido share any features with the host of other animals that may carry the same name. The name is not a property like any other;<sup>11</sup> it is arbitrarily given, but the question is then: does the name function simply as shorthand for a set of properties that exhaustively describe the creature bearing that name?

I don't want to enter at all into the long and fascinating discussion which opposed the descriptivist theory of proper names (whose most prominent proponent was Bertrand Russell), claiming that proper names can be reduced to a cluster of descriptions, and on the other hand the harsh critics of such a theory (most prominently Saul Kripke, whose *Naming and Necessity* (1980) is the most notorious book on the subject), claiming that a proper name is ultimately always a "rigid designator," irreducible to a set of descriptions and properties, based solely on the contingent act of naming rigidly designating its object. Let me take a by-pass. If we take a name like "Slovene," then it refers to a set of descriptions – geographical, historical, linguistic, demographic, etc. – but also to a set of some supposed real or imaginary properties – the Slovenes being diligent, disciplined, hard-working, conscientious, freedom-loving, friendly, god-fearing, proud, etc. (or else pompous, arrogant, envious, conceited, self-hating, self-righteous, take your pick). In this way, the name "Slovene" would be shorthand for these descriptions. The function of the name would be nothing else but wrapping them up in a bundle and bringing them together under the same heading. The name is empty in itself. It is just a sack of elements. It refers to nothing by itself outside of these traits. But is this ever the case? It is rather that the empty signifier designates some mysterious property *x* which is irreducible to

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11 There is an old joke about socialism as the synthesis of the highest achievements of the whole of human history to date: from prehistoric societies it took primitivism; from the Ancient world it took slavery; from medieval society brutal domination; from capitalism exploitation; and from socialism it took the name. The funny sting of this joke (used on some occasions by Slavoj Žižek) is that it takes the name to be a property like any other.

any of the traits; it is rather that one is prey to an inversion, a structural illusion, that all the properties appear to be but emanations of that enigmatic property  $x$  which is designated merely by the name. There is the specter of “Sloveneness” which cannot be quite spelled out by the properties and which is pinned down by the name alone, not any of the positive traits.<sup>12</sup> “Sloveneness” is ineffable, undefinable, unfathomable, inscrutable, immeasurable; it produces the phantom of indescribable depth just by being a pure effect of the empty gesture of naming. The name, beyond all properties, beyond the descriptivist account of proper names, refers to an  $x$  as its proper referent, a singular unnamable substance (as opposed to common names which inhabit different degrees of universality and particularity, and are in principle not singular). It creates an  $x$ , which is an ineffable being without properties, a nothing which nevertheless appears as something. It never goes up in smoke by reduction to descriptions. It persists in its nothingness and provides the pure stuff of fantasies.<sup>13</sup>

It is thus with every name. No name without a specter. Naming is evoking a phantom, conjuring a ghost. One always names more than a cluster of descriptions, the singular ineffable  $x$  is there accompanying the use of names. The name always names the unnamable, or rather by naming it always produces the unnamable, something that cannot be captured by a mere name as shorthand for descriptive traits. The real of the name is what escapes naming, yet stands at its core.<sup>14</sup>

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12 I am borrowing this example freely from the only book by Slavoj Žižek devoted largely to Slovenes, *Jezik, ideologija, Slovenci*, Ljubljana: Delavska enotnost, 1987.

13 All this can be most economically clarified by the Lacanian algebra of  $S1/S2$ .  $S2$  stands for the chain of properties, all of which make sense, while  $S1$  stands for “the signifier without a signified,” a senseless signifier sustained merely by the act of nomination and its contingency. The proper referent of  $S1$  would then be precisely the object “ $a$ ” and its unfathomable being.

14 A great literary testimony to this is Marcel Proust, with his ample ruminations about the images evoked by the names of various places, the phantasmatic cities, their particular flavors and aura, the dreamed up countries, conjured by the mere name. And of course, once he set foot in some of those places, it all evaporated. There was a structurally necessary bitter disappointment – the place looked so different from what its name so vividly evoked. The phantom induced by the name is very central

If we try to pin down the name Janez Janša to a set of positive descriptions, one stumbles on a problem at the outset. One could try “the man born on 17 September 1958 in Ljubljana, twice Slovene prime minister, sentenced to prison on corruption charges, the hero of Slovene independence,” etc., but the trouble is that this person doesn’t bear the name Janez Janša, but Ivan Janša. Everything may be correct, except for the name, the prerequisite of definite description. It all seems that Janša is “always already” redoubled, redoubled from the outset, in himself, known by a name which is not the name of his documents or birth certificate, making a career under an assumed name, thus presenting a good conundrum for the analytical philosophers of language (I am sure Kripke would have loved this and would eagerly include this case in one of his books). The singularity of naming coupled with the singularity of the date and place of birth is already inscribed into a wider social web of recognition, of “also known as,” “aka,” of an assumed and socially recognized identity, apart from the rigid designator attested by documents. Paradoxically, the three Janšas didn’t replicate his name at all, they replicated its double, and since they really possess documents to prove that they are Janez Janša, they “really” are the legitimate bearers of this name, while the original is an impostor.<sup>15</sup> But what is a “real” name? Can a name, freely given to people by choice, be “real” in the sense that other entities are, entities named by the Other, the Platonic name-giver, the supposed divine namer, where we have no choice and no say? Do the official attestation and the documents vouchsafe for the reality of a name?

But maybe the real of a name, apart from its irreducible sound value,

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to Proust’s enterprise – consider just the title of the third part of the first volume, *Le nom de pays: le nom* (*The Name of the Country: The Name*), corresponding to the part of the second volume entitled *Le nom de pays: le pays* (*The Name of the Country: The Country*).

15 Even more: the three Janšas were issued birth certificates from which it follows that they have been born as Janez Janša, by the effect of the name change they have always already been Janez Janša. The name is endowed with a retroactive causality; it is not only a harbinger of a new future career, but also transforms the past.

rather resides in the phantom that is evoked by it, the singular nameless substance it points to. This enigmatic feature is perhaps at the bottom of the unease produced by the name-change of the three Janšas, for if the ineffable *x* is singular, pertaining to that name only in its singularity, then the replication of the name causes some havoc by intervening in this singular substance. It is not that the singular person Janez Janša (aka Ivan Janša) would be affected by this replication – why would a politician of some standing care about some crazy artists changing their names? It is rather that the mysterious singular substance is affected the moment there are more pretenders to it. And if this property *x* of Janez Janša can be referred to as Janšeity (inadequately, for it pertains to its essence that it cannot be named), then it appears that the three new pretenders raise a claim precisely to Janšeity and they threaten to dispossess the one and true agent with a proper claim to it. They threaten to deprive him not of his unique name (for no name is unique), but by willfully embracing this name and replicating it they threaten to divest him of his substance, the *x*, that which is more in him than his name and its descriptive traits, the unnamable treasure and the aura.

Let us now approach names from a very different angle, that of a name-giver and the relation of names to posterity. We can all at some point step into the shoes of the Platonic name-giver and choose names of our children, and the names that we choose will stick to their fates, for better or worse. It depends on our whim how they will “really” be called. We can arbitrarily mark them, and they will have to make do with that fateful mark, live up to it, revolt against it, love it or hate it, but there can be no indifference; names inspire passions that one cannot escape. One striking example will suffice.

Freud had six children: three sons and three daughters. To list them by the order of birth: Mathilde (1887), Jean-Martin (1889), Oliver (1891), Ernst (1892), Sophie (1893), Anna (1895). Freud insisted on choosing the names of the children himself. This is how he commented on this in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:



“I had insisted on their names [of my children] being chosen, not according to the fashion of the moment, but in memory of people I have been fond of. Their names made the children into revenants. [*Ihre Namen machen die Kinder zu Revenants.*] And after all, I reflected, was not having children our own path to immortality?” (PFL 2, p. 487; SA II, pp. 468–9)<sup>16</sup>

This is a most curious remark. To follow its logic, children would actually be like ghosts, the revenants, for their names are chosen on the model of the people we care for so that they would live their afterlife for them. They are by their names doomed to be the impersonations of the dead.<sup>17</sup> Their life already starts as an afterlife. They are ghosts with a mission. Freud, by choosing the names himself, fully exerted his paternal authority on this point as an authority of naming. The name pertains to the father.

So who were the models? First for the sons: Jean-Martin was named after Jean-Martin Charcot, Freud’s great teacher and master in matters of psychiatry, with whom he spent a most formative year at the Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris in 1885–6; Oliver was named after Oliver Cromwell, for whom Freud always harbored a great admiration;<sup>18</sup> and Ernst after

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<sup>16</sup> *The Pelican Freud Library* (PFL), 15 vols., London: Penguin, 1973–86; *Studienausgabe* (SA), 10 vols., Frankfurt/M: Fischer, 1969–75.

<sup>17</sup> At the point of their naming, four out of six models were actually alive. Nevertheless, the point is that children are destined to survive the models after which they have been named, and carry on the torch for them; they are named as already the revenants (literally those who come back), even though of the living.

<sup>18</sup> Freud was anything but naïve, so he commented on this choice in the following manner: “... my second son, to whom I had given the first name of a great historical figure [Oliver Cromwell] who had powerfully attracted me in my boyhood, especially since my visit to England. During the year before the child’s birth, I had made up my mind to use this name if it were a son and I greeted the newborn baby with a feeling of high satisfaction. (It is easy to see how the suppressed megalomania of fathers is transferred in their thoughts on to their children, and it seems quite probable that this is one of the ways in which the suppression of that feeling, which becomes necessary in actual life, is carried out.)” (Quoted from <http://www.freud.org.uk/education/dream/63806/garibaldi-dream/>)

Ernst Brücke, Freud's first great teacher and master in matters of natural science who died three months before the son's birth – Freud spent “the happiest years of his life” in Brücke's physiological laboratory in 1876–81.<sup>19</sup> As for the daughters, Mathilde was named after Mathilde Breuer (born Altmann), the wife of Josef Breuer, Freud's closest friend and collaborator at the time; Sophie after Sophie Schwab-Paneth, a close friend of the family; and Anna after Anna Hammerschlag-Lichtheim, another close family friend and famously Freud's patient – she was the notorious Irma of the dream of Irma's injection, Freud's most famous specimen dream. What the three women had in common was that they were the godmothers to the three daughters.

One cannot but be a bit perplexed: the sons after great scientists and political heroes, the daughters after the friends of the family who eagerly assumed the roles of godmothers. Freud, the great revolutionary, the great discoverer and innovator, was at the same time deeply rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with his very private web of fantasies which conditioned naming, this short-circuit between the most private and the public. Any parent who ever named his or her child knows about the anxiety that comes with naming, the intricate mixture of private fixations and fantasies, personal fancies and fixed ideas, the imaginary aura that surrounds various names, and on the other hand, of the public emblem that the child will have to carry throughout his/her life.

But the intriguing and interesting thing in Freud's remark is the connection that he makes between names and immortality. Having children is our way to immortality, the continuation of our lives through our offspring. But this is not enough. What is at stake is not merely a biological survival of an individual by proxy. There is the question of symbolic transmission by names. The genus will go on and may extend the present individual into possible immortality through

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19 Freud's grandson, the great painter Lucian Freud, was Ernst's son, and in line with the tradition of the family he was duly named after his mother (Lucie Brasch).

his progeny. Our genes may be infinitely replicated. An individual may be seen as a gene's way to create another gene, its double – genes are indeed selfish. To follow Richard Dawkins,<sup>20</sup> they only care about their own reproduction. We are just a means to their ends. Our biological singularity, inscribed in the unique signature of our DNA, may thus be indefinitely continued and prolonged. But the name is like our cultural DNA, the unique mark of our singular inscription into the social, and naming children after our heroes and our beloved ones is propelled by the hope that our cultural DNA may run at least a small part of the way alongside with our biological DNA into the unforeseeable future. The individual name may be seen as a signifier's way to provide its replica, its cultural progeny. The individual is the name's way to make another name. Generically, this holds for family names which generally bear the imprint of the name of the father, the supposed head of the family and the supposed name-giver, but this also holds for the private trade, so to speak, in individual given names, freely chosen, but inspired by the same mission, although in far less predictable ways, prompted by personal enthusiasms, fantasies, preferences, and inclinations.

If the name raises claims to immortality, then Janez Janša may perhaps not be so enthusiastic about being immortalized by these particular replications of his name. Although, who knows, it may prove that they ultimately present a better chance at his immortality than his political career. In the long run, art may last longer than politics.

There is another way that the name is connected to immortality. Brecht speaks somewhere 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 since he was particularly interested in how things constantly change into their opposites and can never remain the same. “He contested that one equals

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20 Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene*, Oxford University Press, 1976.

one, not only because everything that 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 have changed, Emil!’”<sup>21</sup> 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 with these words. The example of dialectics par excellence: everything changes, for example, Emil has turned into a gravestone bearing his name. (It was not me who came up with the name Emil here. It was Brecht, who wrote it referring to Berlin folklore.)

When they changed their names, the three Janez Janšas, and especially the one who dialectically “is and is not” Emil (“namely” Emil Hrvatin), kept pointing 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’ve died, as if you’ve experienced your own death in the (symbolic) relation to others.<sup>22</sup> Brecht’s joke presents the flip side of the matter: the bearer changes, even more, passes away and disappears in the most literal way, but what remains is precisely his name. He has “really” died, but the name has symbolically survived. 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. It presents our chance at immortality. It will outlive us, first in the general sense, as inscribed in the symbolic order and thus serve as a reference point for what we might be remembered for, but then in a more banal and directly material

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21 *Flüchtlingsgespräche, Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 14, Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1982, p. 1460.

22 Most curiously, the online *Glossary of Slovene Art 1945–2005* ([www.pojmovnik.si](http://www.pojmovnik.si), last accessed on October 31, 2017) features brief entries on the three artists prior to their name change, and it undauntedly states 2007 as the year of their death. Emil Hrvatin (1964–2007), Davide Grassi (1970–2007) and Žiga Kariž (1973–2007). The fact that the latter eventually changed his name again to its previous form didn’t resurrect him from the dead in the impartial eyes of the *Glossary* big Other.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

sense, 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 – the word that in English also means a family tomb (Hitchcock's last film was entitled *Family Plot* and it played precisely on this double meaning of the word). They have a secret mission, a destination, the name being that part of us that will one day find itself on our gravestone. The name's secret intent is, among other things, to be carved into the gravestone, into the enduring substance, virtually unchangeable, at least as far as can be foreseen. It is that part of our identity that is more lasting than we are, written on the supposedly most lasting substance of stone. Names are "eternal." We are not. Names last. We pass away. The free choice of the name change has its flip side, the non-choice regarding the gravestone where the name would eventually be carved, the immortal part of our mortal selves, and the context of the symbolic death accompanying the name-change has its flip side in symbolic survival. The name symbolically continues to live its life beyond our lives. It presents the real of our lives beyond our bodily life. On the one hand, there is the part whereby the bearer remains the same, unchanged, and can freely change his names at his whim, without this affecting his or her substance (at least seemingly), but on the other hand, there is the part where the name vindicates itself from beyond the grave, proving to outlast its bearer, who may change his substance but not his name. The name proves to be more "substantial" and enduring than the passing bearer. We are but a brief episode in the long life of our names.

There is a 200-year-old French saying: "There is no room for two Napoleons." It has several variations, e.g. "at the top, there is not enough space for two Napoleons" or "France is not big enough for two Napoleons." If someone claims to be Napoleon, then this is a clear case of a lunatic that has to be put in an asylum – hence also the archetypal

idea of a lunatic claiming to be Napoleon.<sup>23</sup> And since this particular name change does not involve just any name but the name of the prime minister, then in light of this adage it entails a question: is Slovenia big enough not for two, but for four Napoleons?<sup>24</sup> Should the three surplus Napoleons, the Napoleon extras, who zealously claim that they, too, are Napoleons and prove this with documents, be put in an asylum? Or is this an “art project,” and thus a modern alternative to the asylum, since in art, supposedly, everything is allowed and the most preposterous ideas can even be highly socially valued? Where do they belong – in an asylum or in a gallery? Or should they be put in prison, like their model, the Slovene ex-prime minister who eventually landed in prison in June 2014, convicted of corruption? What is the status of “art” in this immediate meddling into the structure of power and its names?

The “art project,” if this is one, poses a most “real” question that relates nomination and domination. The question is not what qualifies someone to bear, e.g. the name Žiga Kariž, but what qualifies someone bearing, e.g. the name Janez Janša to occupy a position of power. What is the intricate connection between a name and power? Is power without a name possible? Is a name not inscribed in power relations 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 the documents and all, the question is raised about the validity and the justification of the symbolic mandate enabling power. Names, to be sure, refer to genealogies, but through that they always involve a certain distribution of power. To arrogate a name is to arrogate power.

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23 According to Lacan’s famous adage, the madman is not the poor wretch who believes himself to be a king, but the true madman in the king who believes himself to be a king. It may be said that a considerable part of Slovene political problems stems from having such a case in our midst.

24 On a more trivial level, the three Janšas experienced quite a few practical difficulties when they couldn’t travel together on a plane because the computer cancelled their surplus tickets, assuming that three passengers with the same name must be an error. So there is no room for two Napoleons even on a plane.

Here is a true story, an episode from Russian history. The story of Boris Godunov, the Russian regent and then the Russian tsar (in the period 1598–1605), who was immortalized first by Pushkin's drama (1831) and then most notably by Mussorgsky's opera (1869/72), one of the most impressive operas in history. It prominently features the episode of the false Dmitry, the pretender to the throne. The story goes that Boris Godunov had a tsarevich Dmitry murdered in 1591 (this was the youngest son of Ivan the Terrible) in his lust for power (although modern historians have doubts about this), and once Godunov became the tsar there appeared a pretender (around 1600) who claimed to be the tsarevich who escaped the assassination.<sup>25</sup> The false Dmitry, seen as a threat and a nuisance by Godunov, fled to Poland where he gathered considerable support and converted to Catholicism to secure the help of Vatican. He entered Russia with his small army in 1604, where a lot of people joined him in his campaign against the unpopular tsar. His army grew. He was initially victorious until his luck changed and he suffered some bad defeats. But when Godunov died in 1605, the tides changed again, so eventually the supposed Dmitry triumphantly entered Moscow surrounded by a mass of followers and was duly crowned as the new tsar Dmitry. The name worked. The name was enough for the claim to power and for the successful accession, although the guy was certainly an impostor, most probably a monk called Grigory Otrepyev. Once on the throne, he married his beloved Polish lady Marina Mniszech, who'd helped him all along. But the tides soon changed again. His Catholicism was a bit too much for Russia. He was assassinated in 1606 along with his supporters, and a new tsar was appointed, Vassily IV. But this was not all: soon a second pretender turned up, the false Dmitry II, again gathering considerable support of Poles and Cossacks, putting up a sizeable army and an armed camp at Tushino.

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<sup>25</sup> In Russian, as in Slovene, the pretender is called *samozvanec*, literally someone who calls himself by a name, someone who gives himself a name, a self-namer. He is not called by that name by the others, but by his own whim.

He, too, had some military success. He tried to seize Moscow but didn't quite manage – although the deposed tsarina Marina, the widow of the first Dmitry, recognized him as the genuine reincarnation of her first husband, claiming that this was the same man. He was assassinated in his own turn in 1610. But this was not all: in 1611, yet another false pretender appeared, the false Dmitry III, again securing some support. The Cossacks acknowledged him as the tsar, but he soon followed the gory fate of his two predecessors in 1612. The hapless widow yet again miraculously recognized the third pretender as the true one, her one and only husband. Can one be married to a name? Here is a lady who married the name Dmitry. She was faithfully married to this one name throughout her life, but it just so happened that it had three different bearers, all of them impostors. The story is fascinating. It appealed not only to the Russians (above all Pushkin and Mussorgsky, but quite a few others), but also to, say, Schiller (with his unfinished drama *Demetrius*) and Rilke (where the story features in his *Malte Laurids Brigge*).

And as if all this was not enough, the story was reenacted once more in the Russian 20<sup>th</sup> century, with the appearance in 1920 of “princess” Anastasia, the supposed youngest daughter of the assassinated last tsar Nicolas, the Grand Duchess who claimed to have escaped assassination and then divided the Russian exile community into a bunch of firm believers and the majority of skeptical opponents. The story was immortalized by Hollywood (Ingrid Bergman got an Oscar for this role in 1956). The lady tried hard to prove her case throughout her life, which entailed one of the longest lawsuits in history, but she was eventually turned down in 1970 on the basis of insufficient evidence. As it turned out, with the DNA analysis in 1994, she was an impostor. Her name was actually Anna Anderson. But of course she was not the only one. Some ten women claimed to be the Grand Duchess Anastasia.<sup>26</sup>

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26 The theme of impostors looms large in Russian culture. Just remember Khlestakov in Gogol's amazing *The Government Inspector (Revizor)* or Chichikov in his *Dead Souls*, or the notorious figure of Ostap Bender in Ilf and Petrov, the proverbial impostor who started to function as an epitome of



The false pretenders assumed the royal name in their claim to power (or to social prestige), and it all ended in bloodshed (or in shame). What's in a name? How come a mere name can lead to so much blood and havoc? The least one can say is that names are not to be taken lightly – there is always the moment of the claim to power in every name, in the assumption of the social role that goes along with it, in the transmission of symbolic legacy, in the social impact, in the inscription into a genealogy, and the royal false pretenders only display this in a particularly salient manner. But their stories also entail the flip side, the moment of bemusement whereby one has the feeling that one is actually always a false pretender, and a false pretender to a royal name that should be vindicated only brings forth some part of our common fate. For there is no way one could inhabit a name legitimately, naturally, with ease, by being fully justified to bear the name one bears. There is no sufficient ground to bear a name. It can never be substantiated. No name is ever covered by the Leibnizian principle of sufficient reason. Proper names, as opposed to common names, can always be other than they are. One is free to choose and to change them, or such is the necessary illusion (while common names are fixed by the dictionary and consensus). The feeling of being an impostor, a false pretender to the name, is not some personal sentiment or idiosyncrasy. It is a structural feeling that accompanies names as their shadow and effect.

The three Janšas, by their name-change, may look something like a reenactment of the three false Dmitrys. They brought to the fore both aspects, the name as a claim to power, the tacit distribution of power that goes along with names, and on the other hand, the false pretense, the impersonation that accompanies the functioning of names. One is always the impersonator of one's own name. Their name-change raised the question not only of them being false pretenders to the name of Janez Janša, but also of Janez Janša being a false pretender to his own name

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something deeply planted in “the Russian soul.”

and to its stakes in power. They never disclosed their motives (claiming personal reasons and, at the most, artistic ambitions), never raised a claim to power (as opposed to the *Dmitrys*), but always maintained (in accordance with the *Dmitrys*) that they were “real” Janez Janšas, which they could prove with their documents, and that is more than their model can do. But by desisting from reasons and justifications, both the implied web of power and the “structural” impersonation came all the more to the fore.

In Slovene history, the memory of the time when people massively changed their names and assumed new ones is still very alive. These were the so-called “partisan names” during the time of the anti-fascist struggle, the assumed names that were based on the tradition of using fictitious names in the circumstances of conspiratorial and illegal activities, covering up “real” identities in order to protect their bearers. But, on the other hand, this justification 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 in a newly chosen and assumed partisan name, which is destined to be the bearer of the real identity, regardless of the official documents. One can be reminded that 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 – another false pretender but bearing the “real” name. For a more direct precedent, one can evoke Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov changing his name to Lenin, Lev Davidovich Bronstein to Trotsky, and Iossif Vissarionovich Dzhugashvili to Stalin. And Josip Broz to Tito. The will for a symbolic

cut, a radical shift in the symbolic fabric of society, manifests itself as the will to renaming.

The name change of the three Janez Janšas is, in a certain way, inscribed into the tradition of the partisan struggle, assuming partisan names, since these new names – three identical ones, contrary to tradition – apart from involving a very practical official change of all the documents, also had the effect of the foundation of a parallel symbolic space, of a virtual new designation and thus the perspective of a different symbolic relation that blurs the delimitation of art, civil status, and political mandate. The impact was conditioned precisely in the disregard of the delimitation of these areas and in their coincidence in the same gesture.

The choice of partisan names was not arbitrary; they always carry a symbolic mandate, although they are seemingly chosen only according to the criterion of having no connection with the real name. It is quite astounding that Edvard Kardelj chose Krištof for his partisan name, which 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 was also what this highest Communist Party luminary dutifully took upon himself, being the second-in-command at Tito's side and his firmest support through decades. The foundation of assuming a new name has biblical dimensions; it extends to the sources of naming, the authority of giving names, back to Adam. The assumed name is now the real name, an inscription into an alternative symbolic network, in opposition to the arbitrariness of civil identity based on spurious authority. The virtual inscription redoubles the ordinary inscription and undermines its symbolic sway.

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 connected precisely with conversion, with adopting a new religion,

with the sudden enlightenment and the new baptism. To take just one notorious example: Cassius Clay, the most famous boxer in history, changed his name to Mohamed Ali and thus marked his conversion to Islam. “Born again,” as the phrase goes, and being born again into the new faith entails a new baptism and the possibility of choosing a new name. Thus also the partisan names marked a conversion to a new belief and entailed a new birth, a baptism, a metamorphosis.<sup>27</sup>

The renaming of the three Janez Janšas 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 by claiming that, until then, their lives had been misguided. And the name they had chosen didn't seem to embody their belief, their political allegiance, or to provide 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. No criticism was ever explicitly voiced. Faced with the media probing, the only reasons they kept repeating were “personal reasons,”

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27 In a strange and somewhat vertiginous counterpart, Adolf Hitler's story also involves a name change. His father was born as Alois Schickelgruber (1837–1903), and having been born out of wedlock he assumed his mother's name. In 1876, thirteen years before Adolf's birth, he made an official request to change his surname to Hiedler, which was the name of his step-father (who subsequently married his mother and might actually have been his biological father, although the evidence is flimsy). When the name change was entered into the official registry in 1877 it was changed to Hitler, for reasons unknown. The biggest stroke of luck in Hitler's entire career thus happened a dozen years before he was born, through the choice made not by him but by his father, concerning precisely “the Name of the Father” – can one imagine masses chanting “Heil Schickelgruber”? What's in a name? There is a name which most often condenses and metaphorises a political movement, but it cannot be any odd name, it has to possess some evocative power and the striking sound value. No matter how persuasive the ideas and how viable the political program, there has to be a persuasive and viable name as their figurehead. The contingent sound value of a name is never contingent. It possesses the power to stir imagination and fantasies. A name is never arbitrary. Witness the caricature name Schickelgruber, as if cut out for a character in a farce.

an intimate personal decision, etc., 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 some new faith, the cloning of three identical names that precisely excludes individuality and uniqueness and, lastly, the choice of the name that does not borrow from any celebrated and mythical past, but points to the not-so-glorious present – all this makes it impossible to make sense of this gesture and its message in any immediate or obvious way. 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 alleged new symbolic order here presents itself precisely as the cloning of the most notorious name around, that of the bearer of the ruling order at the time, and it looks as if mere cloning undermines the model. The new is only the gap in the contingency of the old, the sameness of names points to an arbitrary coincidence of the bearer and the name, as if a new version of the Hegelian infinite judgment was at work here, which asserts a direct identity of entities that have no common measure: Janez Janša = Janez Janša = Janez Janša = Janez Janša. Or, in another vein, not unlike “a rose is a rose is a rose ... is a rose.”

One cannot finish without evoking the best-known scene in the entirety of theatre history, the canonical *locus princeps* of the theatrical tradition, the theatre scene *par excellence*. Juliet stands on the balcony and speaks into the night, and on this most famous spot, she says: “What’s in a name?”<sup>28</sup> Wouldn’t the rose by any other name smell as

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28 “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)

sweet? “O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo? / Deny thy father and refuse thy name.” This is not the question of changing the name, but the question of an exit from the regime of names altogether, 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 hand, 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. Names classify us and allot us a social place. They distribute social power. By the 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 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 culture 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 this curious name, Polikarp, at his birth, in order to stigmatize him as a child born out of wedlock, a bastard. He was doomed to carry that name as his mark of Cain, the name defining his fate from his birth to the bitter end. Although nowadays the codes of naming are more relaxed, elusive and loose, seemingly liberal, they still very much exist and continue to secretly delineate us, although in subtle ways that are hard to decipher.

Where does the name reside? “It is nor hand, nor foot, / Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part / Belonging to a man,” says Juliet, and

further: “’Tis but thy name that is my enemy.” So everything would be all right, or so it seems, if only he could cut off his name, the source of all trouble, and this is what he indeed attempts to do at some point. “In what vile part of this anatomy / Doth my name lodge?” asks Romeo later in the play (III/3). “Tell me that I may sack / The hateful mansion.” And he draws his sword, as the stage directions indicate, prepared to cut off that vile bodily part, to cut off his name with the sword, castrate himself of his name, the name of the Father,<sup>29</sup> but to no avail. To cut off the name in order to espouse the immediacy. “Deny thy father and refuse thy name” – in order to fully assume love? This is the fantasy of the Verona lovers – love beyond names and signifiers, the communion of immediate being.

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, the true bond of love and passion based on singularity. And this is at the core of their tragedy: the name has nevertheless affected their being and took revenge. They couldn’t overcome the way they were marked by their proper names. There is no way one can cut off names as expendable additions, for names as intruders are nevertheless what gives us access to being, and they affect being.

Does Emil Hrvatin by the name Janez Janša smell the same? Will the name Janez Janša ever smell the same?

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29 What part of the body might he purport to cut off when he draws his sword? Does he tacitly assume that “the phallic signifier” resides in his phallus? Is this not the spontaneous assumption that the audience inevitably makes? This is like an almost caricature Lacanian *Urszene*, bringing together the Name of the Father, the phallic signifier, castration, and the nature of love. The fate of the Veronese lovers may actually be sealed by this assumption that true love resides in the immediacy, by getting rid of the phallic signifier of the name as the intruder into the purity of heart.

Jela Krečič

IN THE  
NAME  
OF A NAME



Would Coca-Cola taste as sweet as it does now with another name? Would it taste different with the name Janez Janša? These questions (which paraphrase Juliet's famous monologue from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*) were posed in *350 Janez Janša Coca-Cola Bottles*, one of the recent projects of Janez Janša, Janez Janša, and Janez Janša. The project addresses today's marketing strategy in which big corporations no longer appeal to an indistinct mass of consumers but offer individual consumers a personalized product. It clearly refers to Andy Warhol's *210 Coca-Cola Bottles* and *Green Coca-Cola Bottles*, with an important difference: The Janez Janšas produced "their" work by replacing the label "Coca Cola" with "Janez Janša." Something new emerged in this way, although they accepted the terms and conditions of the Coca-Cola company which apply to all of its customers.<sup>1</sup>

This work is to some extent exemplary of the three Janez Janšas' overall project. First, it opens up a very important philosophical question: what is the relationship between words and things? Do words accurately grasp the essence of things? More precisely, what is the relationship between proper names and their bearers? This theme haunts the entire history of philosophy from Plato's *Cratylus* to its modern "linguistic turns."<sup>2</sup>

The second dimension of *350 Janez Janša Coca-Cola Bottles* concerns the political field in the broadest sense of the word: it touches upon the functioning of today's neoliberal capitalism and the social relationships it entails.

The third theme concerns the problem of authorship. Not only do our artists rely on the history of conceptualism and ready-mades, they

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1 I owe this interpretation to a text by Domenico Quaranta, published on the Janez Janšas' webpage (see Domenico Quaranta, *350 Janez Janša Coca-Cola Bottles*, <http://www.janezjansa.si/works/350-janez-jansa-bottles>, accessed July 5, 2017). The webpage will be my main reference in the analysis of Janez Janšas' other works later on.

2 The overview of philosophical attempts at resolving this problem would require its own book. Let us here point to Mladen Dolar's *What's in a Name?* (see pp. 6–39), an excellent work dedicated to this dimension of the name-change and to the work of the Janez Janšas.

do nothing more than any other eager Coca-Cola consumer would have done. In what way do the Janšas deserve the title of artists? Why are they not like just another regular John Doe who applied for this service offered by the Coca-Cola Company? This question, the question of authorship, requires a more thorough examination. The main endeavor of this paper is to provide an interpretation of the three Janez Janšas' work through the complex prism of authorship.

We can hardly find any Western work of art without a proper name or without an author. The first one to explicitly thematize the problem of the artist as author was Giorgio Vasari in his *The Lives of the Most Excellent Painters, Sculptors, and Architects* written in 1550. While Vasari acknowledges painters as crucial for the production of art – in contrast to craftsmanship – the problem of authorship has since, due to several historical processes, become even more stringent. The theme of authors, artists, and geniuses as intrinsically linked to the art field has been well developed and researched in philosophy. The notion of “author” became especially problematic with the advent of postmodern thought and theory.<sup>3</sup>

One of the most interesting and compelling accounts of the problem of authorship is provided by Michel Foucault in his text “What is an

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3 Roland Barthes wrote a famous text entitled “Death of the Author” where he sheds light on the matter of authorship, trying to demythologize the notion of author in the West. Barthes argues that a text is autonomous in regard to its maker, the author: we should abolish the author as the ultimate reference that can unveil the essence of a text. The author is a kind of modern fantasy or illusion which blurs and limits the power and depth of a text: “The author is a modern figure, produced no doubt by our society insofar as, at the end of the middle ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or, to put it more nobly, of the ‘human person.’ Hence it is logical that, with regard to literature, it should be positivism, resume and the result of capitalist ideology, which has accorded the greatest importance to the author’s ‘person.’” Barthes obviously has a point acknowledging that we cannot reduce or interpret a text according to the author’s particularities and the whole context he brings with his name. We can agree that psychology or even the conditions of making an artwork cannot be a basis for interpretation or at least not an interpretation that tries to be loyal to the work itself. It is however at least a little bit curious that Barthes’s text had a great impact because it was written by Roland Barthes, the famous semiologist. See Roland Barthes, *Three Essays*, available on <http://www.ubu.com/aspen/aspen5and6/threeEssays.html#barthes>.

Author?”<sup>4</sup> The purpose of his text is to show how authorship, instead of providing an explanation for a work of art or for the functioning of a certain discourse, actually generates problems of its own. Foucault is not interested in the author as an individual, as a person with a private life, although he finds it interesting that the author became so individualized in our culture. He is interested in the relationship between the author and his work. He investigates the “author function,” as he calls it, and all the dilemmas it implies. He claims that the work is as important in building the author’s name as the author and his name are crucial for the work. However, how do we define work? Can we talk about work if there is no author? “What, for instance, were Sade’s papers before he was consecrated as an author?”<sup>5</sup> And as far as the author goes, is everything he wrote and said part of his work? Foucault gives a convincing example: what do we include in Nietzsche’s opus? Everything, of course, but where do we draw the line? Should a note about an appointment or a laundry bill that we find in his notebook be included in his work?

Furthermore, Foucault develops quite thoroughly several difficulties considering authorship; they begin with a name, the author’s name. A proper name is a description, writes Foucault. It is a shorthand for what a person did, for what he or she is famous for, etc. “When we say ‘Aristotle,’ we are using a word that means one or a series of definite descriptions of the type: ‘the author of the *Analytics*,’ or the ‘founder of ontology’ and so forth.”<sup>6</sup> The meaning of a person’s name remains the same even if we discover that he did not write a certain work. That does not stand for the author, though. Foucault concludes that a proper name and the author’s name oscillate between description and design-

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4 Although Foucault never mentions Barthes or Barthes’s theses on authorship, we can see his text as a response to a debate started by Barthes. See Michel Foucault, “What Is an Author?” in *The Art of Art History: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Donald Preziosi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

5 *Ibid.*, 323.

6 *Ibid.*, 325.

nation and, “granting that they are linked to what they name, they are not totally determined by their descriptive or designating functions.”<sup>7</sup> However, the relationship between a proper name and an individual on the one hand and the author’s name and “that which it names” on the other is not isomorphic.

The author’s name again points to several paradoxes. In contrast to a proper name, the author’s name is interwoven with a set of texts and works, so the meaning of the work changes if we discover that a certain author did not exist or that someone else wrote a known book ascribed to this author. The author’s name, writes Foucault, cannot be reduced to an element in a discourse “(...) as a subject, a complement, or an element that could be replaced by a pronoun or other parts of speech.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the author’s name serves as a means of classification: a name can group together a number of texts and thus differentiate them from others. A name also establishes different forms of relationships among texts. This is why Foucault says that the author’s name characterizes a manner of a discourse.

If a proper name moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of the author remains at the contours of the texts – separating one from another, defining their form and mode of existence. It has an ambiguous status since it is not simply a matter of civil status or a mere part of a fiction. “It is situated in the breach, among the discontinuities, which gives rise to new groups of discourse and their singular mode of existence.”<sup>9</sup>

The author’s name is linked to what Foucault calls the author function. He discerns several of its characteristics. Firstly, claims Foucault, authors have become an object of appropriation which happened at a precise historical moment. This simply means that the author function

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7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 326.

is an object of regulations and systematizations (legal, copyright, etc.) which determine the realm of discourses.

Secondly, Foucault realizes that there is no universal model for the author function. Not all of the discourses in our culture or civilization (or at least not at all times) needed an author, although literary discourse (and art discourse in general, we could add) still very much depends on the author function.

The third dimension of the author function is connected with the construction of the author – with how we attribute authorship, a practice that can be traced back to early Christianity. Foucault discerns four ways in which we assign authorship to a set of texts: Firstly, the author guarantees a certain quality of his work; secondly, the author brings a conceptual and theoretical coherence; thirdly, the author is seen as stylistic uniformity; plus the author is a historical figure in which a series of events diverge. Modern literary theory needs the author as an element of unity and as a figure which amortizes all contradictions and possible differences in his writing. The author therefore functions as a stabilizing or tranquilizing element that resolves any disparities in a discourse.

Lastly, the author function does not refer to an individual. “It would be as false to seek the author in relation to the actual writer as in relation to the fictional narrator; the ‘author-function’ arises out of their scission – in the division and distance of the two.”<sup>10</sup> The author function gives rise to a variety of egos and to a series of subjective positions that “an individual of any class may occupy.”<sup>11</sup>

Foucault recognizes that focusing his analysis on authors of texts and books is somewhat limited. By this observation he is not only aiming at the fact that also other arts (not only literature) are defined and determined by the author function, but that there are also authors

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 329.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

of theoretical fields and disciplines who have invented entirely new discourses, Marx and Freud being two “modern” examples. The role of the author in such a discourse has even more implications and effects, one of them being the mass production of other authors’ text on Freud’s or Marx’s inventions of discourse, for instance.

But here we are focusing on authors and their function in artistic discourse. If we try to further analyze Foucault’s four functions, we can see that only two deal with the author in relationship to a discourse. The first concerns the appropriation of the author, the legal and other boundaries of his work, and the second acknowledges that the author can have a function only in specific fields or discourses and in specific historical periods. The third function – authenticity, originality, style, the unity of the author’s opus – deals with the author function in specific relation to his oeuvre, and the last one that assigns plurality of egos to the author function addresses the problem of subjectivities implied in the author’s work.

Perhaps the most important function of the author and his name is connected to its effects (on a discourse, as well as on a (reading) subject or audience). More precisely, the author’s name engenders the illusion that we can provide a coherent interpretation of it or that we can grasp it or fully understand it.

Psychoanalysis perhaps proposes a more accurate concept for this dimension of authorship. The author is a subject that is supposed to provide coherent meaning, if we paraphrase Lacan’s definition of the psychoanalyst’s function as that of *sujet supposé savoir* (the subject is supposed to know). In analogy with the psychoanalyst’s function (where the analysand’s illusion about the psychoanalyst’s power to cure him or to adequately interpret his symptoms enables analysis to create effects), the author function in relation to its reader or readership and critique also creates the illusion of a coherent meaning, artistic excellence, and enjoyment, and thereby guarantees the progress of the process of reading, understanding, and critique. As is known, another name for such

understanding of the psychoanalyst's function is transference, so we may as well say that the "author" is an instance which also provides the effects of meaning on the basis of similar transference. The "author" enables a certain interpretation, a certain way of consumption of the work, or at least he guarantees that such apprehension can be achieved.

Although an author's work might as well disappoint us, the reading process always starts with a certain premature supposition about the work of art we are about to read (see, listen to). The reading process is always marked by the reader's presupposition (or expectation) of what the author "wanted to say"; this also holds when we start reading a book (looking at a painting, etc.) of an unknown author. The lack of any knowledge or pre-established idea about the work is experienced exactly as the empty frame of addressing it. The lack of any knowledge is a form of apprehension with which we (readers, critics) approach this unsigned work. It is not that we ascribe certain characteristics per se to the unknown author; we ascribe to the work an author whose function enables the process of consuming art (text) to proceed.<sup>12</sup>

We are not exaggerating if we say that this kind of author function can only function under the flag of an author's name: the author's proper name is a shorthand for the function the author has for the meaning or for interpretation in any given field of art or art discourse.

### **Janez Janša as an author**

If the aim of Foucault's text is to expose the difficulties and paradoxes of authorship, the project of the three artists named Janez Janša confuse things even further. This confusion concerns authorship in the contemporary art field and the relationship between the author(s) and their work.

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12 One might add that the same could be said also for pseudonyms.

The Janez Janšas as authors and their work make all the features of the author function as previously pointed out even more apparent. The first thing that requires our attention is the fact that the author's name in their work belongs to three authors or artists. The serialization of the name adds to the ambiguity of their artworks, of their author function, and of the functioning of the artistic system. First of all, the three artists created vast opuses under their previous names, the names they were given at birth, so that one of the consequences of their name-change was that they had to prove themselves as artists all over again and to build the author function anew. Furthermore, the new name casts a shadow on their previous work and changes it. It proves Foucault's thesis about a deep connection between the author's name and his work: if the same work is signed by "Davide Grassi" or by "Janez Janša," it makes it a different work.

Then there are the individual works that the three Janšas make under their new name in their chosen fields: one of the Janšas is still a media artist and producer, another a theatre director and performer, and the third (who also exhibits under his original name Žiga Kariž) is still engaged in the visual art scene. The use of the same name in the fields of art that to some extent coincide (especially in the small art scene in Slovenia, but also in the international space), is confusing: it constantly raises the question who is the author, or to which author a certain work belongs, and creates at least a certain degree of reflection about what art field (or art discourse, as Foucault would say) it stands for.<sup>13</sup> One of the main effects of their name-change certainly affirms Foucault's main thesis that the author's name and the author function forms a significant, if not the most important, part of what we call

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13 This feature becomes even more pertinent if we take into account the fact that there is another public persona who operates under the name Janez Janša: the politician and leader of the rightist-nationalist opposition in Slovenia. The shadow of his name and the baggage it carries with it is always lurking behind the artists' public endeavors. On the other hand, the shadow of Janez Janšas' work also lurks behind the politician's political maneuvers.



the art scene or art discourse.<sup>14</sup> It is not necessary to point out how the multiplicity of the same name which belongs to different authors produces some confusion when it comes to the legal and copyright aspects of their work; or how it disturbs the unifying function of their work; or how the variety of egos that Foucault ascribes to the author function gains a whole new meaning when it comes to the Janšas' work. Foucault's claim that the author function works differently in different discourses also becomes obvious with them: Janšas' project resonates in the field of art as well as in the field of politics, or, more precisely, in the way a state identifies its citizens.

But the most interesting dimension we encounter with the three artists' name-change is connected to the work they do together, as the three Janšas.<sup>15</sup> This is not compelling only because the serialization of the name has effects on the artwork and art scene in general, but because they choose to make the name – the author's name – the central object or the central concern of their work. This part of their work will be the focus of our investigation from here on.

The three Janez Janšas not only function as authors in an art field, they – or, more precisely, their names themselves – also function as a work of art, and this complication poses a real interpretative challenge. What does this artistic intervention tell us about name and art?

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14 One cannot even imagine how the art world, the system of galleries, museums, art fairs, biennials, and triennials, would function without an author's name. The major art institutions are known for the variety of the "big names" they have in their collections. The art market is especially contained by the "big names." It would be hard to understand how a small sketch can be sold at auctions for millions of dollars if it was not signed by a Picasso or some other artistic "genius." We have to add here that in the art world of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the name of the curator is becoming as important (if not more so) than the author's name. The big curatorial names themselves take on a lot of what was in previous centuries ascribed to the authors or artists themselves. This is also what makes contemporary art somewhat different than other artistic categories such as music or literature.

15 When we speak of the "Janez Janša project," we have in mind mostly the opus they created together, but we also take into account the above-mentioned other aspects of their project – the way in which this project affects the work they do as individuals and other discourses.

First, it must be said that a certain ambiguity or even indiscernibility characterizes the work of the three mentioned authors. The name change of the three Janšas was announced to the public with a wedding: Janez Janša married Marcela Okretič, and the best men of both the bride and the groom were Janez Janša and Janez Janša. Obviously this episode belongs to the private lives of the three artists and has nothing to do with art, and yet in this case the three artists used a private ritual for their public name-change coming-out.

Foucault emphasizes that the author cannot be simply reduced to an individual, to his private life – which is to say that his private life, his biographical characteristics, also enter his work and the art discourse. Moreover, the division between private and public is not clear in art, especially after the arrival of artistic modernism and avant-garde movements: in avant-garde movements the artist's posture or pose is as much a part of his life as he is himself part his of art. After Duchamp's invention of conceptual art, the artist's position becomes even more important since, with it, an artistic idea or concept equals an artistic artifact, so that everything that concerns the artist can become art. After Duchamp, the artist belongs to the public sphere in a very emphatic way – even the things he does in his private life are part of his art. In the case of the Janšas, this is even more so since they treat their name as a work of art (which is further developed through time) – the episodes in the life of their name are a crucial part of their project.

Erasing the line between the private and public domain of a life is therefore inherent to their work. One could argue that the name itself contains this paradox: it is the signifier that renders its bearer a license to private life, to his innermost psyche, to his intimacies, but it is at the same time the thing that ties a person to the society or community. A name is a currency with which a subject interacts with others and enters into many kinds of relationships.

One of the first artistic gestures of the Janšas was the action entitled *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav*. This art-piece requires a brief

look into the Slovene history of art: the first one to “create” the work *Triglav* (Mount Triglav) was the Slovene neo-vanguard group OHO: it was performed by group members Milenko Matanović, David Nez, and Drago Dellabernardina on December 30 1968 at Zvezda Park in Ljubljana.<sup>16</sup> In 2004 the Irwin group – which was in the eighties a part of a large retro-vanguard artistic movement *Neue Slowenische Kunst* – re-enacted this work at the same location as part of their *Like to Like* series, reinterpreting slightly the individual actions of the OHO group.

So the first artistic act of the Janez Janšas was a new re-enactment of these events which took place on Monday August 6 2007. The difference between the first two performances or actions and Janšas’ *Triglav* was that the last one took place on the mountain itself, so that their literal version of the performance has a “malevichian” gesture inscribed into it – we are dealing with a Triglav on Triglav.

The Janšas described their work as an action with which they commemorated 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 Lake Wörthersee across Mount Triglav to Lake Bohinj; the 25th anniversary of the publication of *Nova Revija* magazine; 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.<sup>17</sup> Obviously, this commemoration of all the attributes that Slovene nationalists take very seriously should be regarded as an ironic gesture, or at least as an act which – with the overabundance of important dates for the Slovene homeland – reveals this nationalism as a bit nonsensical and ridiculous.

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16 It is important to add that the name Triglav in Slovene means “three heads” (the mountain has three peaks).

17 The artists took the list of the anniversaries from a poster found in one of the mountain houses on the way to Triglav. The poster announced a cultural event on the occasion of the six anniversaries that took place two days before the artists climbed Triglav.

However, if we put Slovene politics aside, this action was important because with it the three artists created the context in which their work should be interpreted. Foucault would say they pointed to a discourse in which they should be acknowledged: the discourse of Slovene contemporary art. The function of their name – the author's name Janez Janša – in this inaugural gesture is that it is displayed in its plurality and unity at the same time: there are three artists named Janša, yet they function as one body, the body of Triglav.

### **Name as a ready-made**

We have established that a name, the author's name, has a certain value or, better yet, confers a certain value to an artwork. But what happens when a name becomes an artwork? How does it become that? An exhibition by our three authors entitled *NAME Readymade* in the steirischer herbst art festival in Graz (Austria) in 2008 may give us an answer. The main theme of this exhibition was a name-change; more specifically, it addressed the question: what effects does a name-change leave on a person and also on art? In Graz, the artists exhibited their own legal documents: ID cards, passports, birth certificates. What is significant about these objects is that, with their entrance into an art institution, their status changed or at least multiplied. They are no longer just valid legal documents, they are at the same time – and without losing their legal significance – works of art. The author's name, author function and their work overlap in the most literal sense, and, paradoxically, the effect of this collision is that it makes all the different levels of a name and of the author's name visible.

The artists no longer use their name as a mark of an artwork's originality, of the authenticity of the artwork, they rather proclaim the name itself as an artwork. The Janez Janšas strip away a part of themselves – the part that belongs to the state or to the civic sphere of their

persona – and exhibit it. This legal, civic dimension materialized in passports, birth certificates, etc., is usually something we do not think about when we look at an artwork or at an author's name. We usually consider artists as those people who belong to the culture and leave their mark in a discourse, so that they are in many ways above their civic dimension – they seem not to belong to the legal and civic state as everyone else does. They cannot be perceived as subjects who have rights and perform their civic duties. To put it bluntly, merely performing the author function is considered an author's right and civic duty.

Here the division between the author function and the civic persona becomes palpable, and the author function (which is usually connected to artistic signature) is lost in this procedure. Artists themselves as artists become a curious version of *homo sacer*, excrements of their own name. It is the name that gets all the spotlight of the show, while the authors could be prosecuted for the neglect of their legal documents. In other words: this self-inflicted obliteration results in exposing the artistic subject as a mere leftover of his name. Not only has the artwork already lost much of its aura by the fact that our three artists with the same name are its authors, the work also loses the presumed individual originality since it renders its authors meaningless: they are deprived of the possibility to perform their author function and, in this way, they also lose their function as the subject that is supposed to enable interpretation. While the authors resonate in the work, their work at the same time remains totally ambiguous; instead of enabling interpretation, it opens up several questions and does not even promise that an interpretation is possible.

The *NAME Readymade* exhibition in Graz thereby implies that the work of the three authors is a ready-made, a concept necessary for the understanding of their project. Many of the Janšas' other artistic projects are based on this concept and in this way deepen the formula of a new artistic subjectivity, authorship, and work. Their project *Auction* entails a real auction which took place on November 18th 2010 and was led by

the director of Austrian Sotheby's Andrea Jungmann. At this event the conceptual artwork *PB0241891 (Passport)* by Janez Janša, Janez Janša, and Janez Janša was sold for 1900 Euros. The auction was organized by curators Alexandra Grausam and Elsy Lahner, and was part of the group exhibition *Hard to Sell, Good to Have* at Palais Sturany in Vienna. The auction is important mainly because in it, a legal document gained the recognition of an art institution (the fact that the owner for the time being received only a certificate and not an actual passport does not diminish this recognition). This also provides another insight into the nature of the three Janez Janšas' artwork. The document as a mediator or interface for the name – at least in its legal dimension – is not once and for all finished, completed. It has a double life: it is a work of art, but since it operates and functions as a legal document (or as the state's evidence of the subject), it has a limited lifespan – its nature changes (it loses validity) when it expires. When its civic dimension is gone, the artwork is reduced to a printed name on a worthless booklet.

Another example of the name's emancipation from the authors is a series of events called *Signatures*<sup>18</sup> where the three authors inscribed their name into public spaces. On Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro the name Janez Janša was spelled out on the beach by 136 umbrellas; on the facade of Kunsthaus Graz the name appeared as a digital sign; in similar fashion it was displayed on the Monnaie de Paris building; in the Hollywood Walk of Fame we also find a star dedicated to Janez Janša; in Konjsko sedlo valley the same name was composed with Alpine stones. The most notorious of these kinds of projects is the one called *Signature Event Context* performed at the transmediale festival in Berlin in 2008 where the three Janez Janšas walked through the Holocaust Memorial, and a GPS signal traced their steps, so that the path this device showed on a dedicated web page spelled out the name Janez Janša on the embedded Google map.

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18 These works are captured only on photos and most of them also on video.

Here we are dealing with the author's name in the form of a signature. This is a material mark that usually grants a work of art all that belongs to the author function, from the legal and copyright level to its authenticity dimension which is again connected to its market price on the one hand and to the possibility of interpretation on the other hand. What stands out in this project is that a signature emancipates itself – it is no longer just the mark of the author, it is no longer a signifier that renders meaning and auratic sense (to use Benjamin's term). The signature becomes the art-piece that begs interpretation: it obfuscates authorship and blurs what artwork actually is in this context.

A name now inscribed into the public memorial with an enormous symbolic weight (it is dedicated to the Jews killed by the Nazis) functions as a public statement, a gesture of putting a signature in the spotlight as the thing itself, as an artwork which can be at the same time understood as an act of appropriation. With such a signature the above-mentioned places (the Memorial, the Copacabana beach, the art institution, the mountain, etc.) become conceptual artworks, a form of urban ready-mades.

The exhibition *Signature* (2010), realized in collaboration with the Koroška Gallery of Fine Arts, can be perceived as an extension and formalization of *Signatures*. This project consists of twenty-seven paintings commissioned by the three Janšas and painted by the artist Viktor Bernik. Each of them depicts the signature "Janez Janša" in thick acrylic paint. In this case each artist's signature becomes an image which is signed in different ways in the bottom right corner: some of the paintings are signed by one of the three artists, some by the trio, using both their current names and the old ones. In the twenty-seven paintings we encounter four different combinations of words, that is, variations of four names and surnames: Davide Grassi, Emil Hrvatin, Janez Janša, and Žiga Kariž.

If the project *Signatures* can be perceived as a series of public performances in which a signature is torn out of its normal scale and spread into the wider public and natural space as a work of art, *Signature*

remains much more rooted in the visual art system. What the series of 27 paintings makes visible is how we take the signature of the author for granted – it appears self-evident that in the history of art every painting (or at least a majority of artworks) bears a name, the mark of an author. What the three Janšas do in *Signature* is thus a gesture worthy of Duchamp: they take this mark of an author and, again, treat it as the artwork itself. What was before only a mark of the author function is now the artwork itself. To emphasize the role of author in art and in art system, the three artists play with the signatures under the paintings and exercise several variations of authorship. To further complicate things, the authorship of these paintings is in fact dubious. The images of the three signatures are obviously signatures of the three artists, but the paintings were made by another artist, Viktor Bernik, who was hired by the Janšas to paint them. The Janšas are the authors of their own signatures which were then painted on canvas by Bernik, with as much likeness to the real signatures as possible but then signed, instead of the by painter, by the Janšas themselves.

## **Bank cards**

As we have tried to show, the name as a ready-made in the Janez Janša project concerns citizenship and art – in other words, it concerns the author function the three artists are ready to sacrifice to the field of art in the form of a name as a work of art. The result of this operation is that they are reduced to a sort of non-being or a being-for-art or even a being-for-the-art-of-name. Here we are dealing with another dimension of a name – the dimension of identity.<sup>19</sup> The art project of the Janez

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<sup>19</sup> One of the most productive insights into the problem of identity was elaborated by Jacques Lacan. Symbolic identity is a concept he deals with in several works. Let it suffice to mention the way he conceives of identity in his so-called “graph of desire” where he develops the difference between imaginary identity and the symbolic one. The elegance of his argument is that he shows



Janšas also deals with legal identity and identification, which is to say that it concerns the way the state recognizes and identifies its citizens: by legal documents, pictures, and biometric data (like the fingerprint in a passport).

This becomes especially important in the project *All About You* by the three Janez Janšas: a special triptych comprised of three enhanced ID cards of the three artists; however, each of them is a mosaic composed of one hundred bankcards (Visa®, Mastercard®, Maestro®). In this project the artists exploited the possibility of so-called personalized cards offered by banks to their clients: a user can apply for a bankcard which features his favorite visual motif (as long as it complies with the bank's regulations and guidelines).<sup>20</sup>

For the *All About You* exhibition, each of the artists first enlarged the image of his ID card, divided it into a hundred sections the size of a bankcard, and then, for the next fifteen months, repeatedly applied for a new personalized bankcard, each of the bankcards featuring one part of the image of his ID card. The process did not proceed smoothly since, from the bank's perspective, the elements of the Slovenian ID cards are not entirely neutral. There are several words in two languages printed on the cards, including the word *spol* (sex). In accordance with their regulations, bank officials thus often rejected the applications by the three Janšas. Some even considered problematic the word "Janša" adorning the card even though the name of the cardholder Janez Janša is printed on the card. The three mosaics in the exhibition are thus not complete; two of them are missing several parts of the jigsaw puzzle.

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how imaginary identity relies on the symbolic one: the way the Other perceives us constitutes the way we want to perceive ourselves, i.e., there is no imaginary identification without the symbolic one. See Jacques Lacan, "The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire in the Freudian Unconscious," *Écrits* (London, New York: W.W Norton & Company, 2006), 671-703.

<sup>20</sup> The bank, for instance, does not permit the use of motifs containing controversial words or copyrighted signs and images.

This work opens up another dimension of the Janez Janša project – the financial and economic one. The idea for this project came from Nigeria where the MasterCard Corporation, in collaboration with the Nigerian government, is planning to launch a so-called smart multi-purpose card which will combine an individual's personal, biometric, health, banking, and other data. The title of the exhibition was inspired by the United Bank for Africa's campaign announcing the debit MasterCard with the slogan "All About U." This is a personalized debit card which was introduced by the bank's managing director as follows: "You do not need a bank logo, but your personal logo or identity." This corresponds nicely to today's ideology where an individual and his wishes are highly praised. Today's ideology is based on the idea that a person should be in touch with what he or she wants or desires: he or she is no longer bound to the demands of the wider community or state but is only required to answer to himself or herself, to his/her demands and wishes.

A bank card that echoes a person's identity also exemplifies how today it is expected from an individual to never fully embrace a particular identity but to endlessly transform it in an endless response to his or her changing personality, wishes, and life-long education. Needless to say this ideology goes hand in hand with the capitalist requirement for a workforce which is flexible, never bound by a steady contract or steady employment. The idea of limitless possibilities for an individual and the limitless potential he or she should develop has a darker side – all his or her activities or endeavors to find a new self are the object of constant surveillance which sustains marketing possibilities for the big corporations with access to all of an individual's data, and also gives the state apparatus an insight into his/her (potentially or supposedly) threatening activities. The idea of all personal data combined in one card reveals how the individual's identity as it is captured in such a card trespasses on the field of citizenship, human rights, etc., and enters the field of economy (or, rather, of political economy, to use the pertinent

Marxist term) – how else should we conceive of the interconnection between state and corporations in the form of such cards?

The project therefore anticipates the processes that have to some extent already been put into action, placing personal, health, and other data into the hands of private companies. The fact that hundreds of bankcards in the exhibited triptych are combined into the ID cards of the Janez Janšas may be seen as an allegory of the world of corporations eating into the spheres that used to be the prerogative of the state. The message of this project is therefore quite troublesome: while an individual is put on the path of endlessly rediscovering him- or herself, the economic field already has broad access to parts of his or her identity. To put it in another words, at the end, the identity that really matters is the one that corporations, banks, and states are interested in or make money from. Today, maybe more than ever before, under the flag of free access to any kind of identity, the question of a subject's personal identity is becoming less and less important since his or her destiny is in the hands of systems much bigger and powerful than the individual. Janez Janšas' *All About You* is an ironic manifestation of the fact that our civic status, our public identity, has already been subdued to our economic system, to global capitalism.

As far as the art field is concerned, the main feature of *All About You* is the special kind of temporality it introduces: as Lev Kreft pointed out in *Manifold Triptych*,<sup>21</sup> the nature of this artwork is changing in time in relation to the validity of the last three valid bankcards included in the artwork (the other 97 cards expired at the time of a new application being lodged). "At the end, it will be just a representation of three identity cards made from out-of-use bank cards. In such a state, it may be owned and possessed by any buyer because it does not consist of any valid document, and it will continue to be an artwork – a representation of three IDs, but not the same artwork as

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21 Lev Kreft, [Manifold Triptych](#) (Ljubljana: Aksioma, 2017).

it was during the process of production and the first phase of existence when each new element of construction was alive and valid until next set arrived.”<sup>22</sup>

Similarly to the *Signature* or *350 Janez Janša Bottles* projects, the artwork raises questions with regard to authorship: is the author of the artwork the bank, the legitimate owner of the cards which has also produced all of them? Are the real artists the Janez Janšas who were the bank clients applying for hundreds of bankcards, and who also paid about eight euros for every new bankcard being issued? Is the only real author Miljenko Licul who designed the template for the Slovenian ID card? In fact, as merely the users and not the owners of the bankcards, the artists would actually break the law if they sold their artwork while some of the cards are still valid.<sup>23</sup>

This project thereby indicates that the author function as analyzed by Foucault should be completed by the temporal dimension. In general the author's name has an unlimited lifespan – the author function promises the continuity and stability of an artwork. In case of *All About You* this promise is broken or, rather, not even given: the artwork, its nature, its status, will change with time – and so will its ownership.

## **The conclusion of the name**

What happens when a name, the author's name, becomes the object of the artwork itself? What can we say about art being produced in the name of the name? On the one hand we are dealing with a certain ethical gesture of the authors: they surrender their artistic subjectivity or subjectivities to the realm of one name and its effects. With this willing subordination, the author function also changes: we no longer have

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 13.

an artistic figure of big Other (the subject that is supposed to render interpretation) that guarantees the meaning of his work; we have three interchangeable authors who unmask or deconstruct this very figure of the author.

On the other hand the political or social dimension of the author is brought into light. With a name so bluntly occupying the central stage of an artwork we are compelled to perceive it as something which is owned by the state, by this other big Other which to some extent operates with it and its subjects. In this sense the Janšas' work trespasses on artistic discourse and enters a very basic political one: the one that establishes citizenship and the way this citizenship is governed today. With some of their projects, above all *All About You* and *350 Janez Janša Bottles*, the Janšas also enter the economic field and point out the way economic discourse is overtaking or governing others. Or, to put it in other words, this discourse embodies today's ideology which presents the capitalistic blurring of the boundaries between state and private capital as something neutral or even in the best interest of the citizen and his or her ever changing identity.

All of the Janšas' activities, performed in the name of the name, bring us again to the ontological dimension of a name which has haunted philosophy for centuries. Once turned into a piece of art, a name begins to produce various effects on the subject and the Other. It starts to diminish, destruct even, the symbolic universe, the universe of meaning, understanding, and interpretation – it becomes the real it was supposed to name. The name is the real bearer constantly disrupting the author function and the way discourses work, a bearer waiting to be correctly named, signified, and accepted into the symbolic field.

As Lacan put it, when the symbolic falls into the real, we are in psychosis – a psychotic treats words like things. The Janšas' experiments may often appear as half-crazy to a naïve gaze, but in fact they indicate, in a much more ominous way, the psychotic dimension that our entire late capitalist civilization is slowly but inexorably approaching.



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**  
*350 Janez Janša Bottles* (detail), 2017  
Installation, 28.5 x 155 x 265 cm  
A Malta Festival Commission







⤵

**OHO**

Milenko Matanovic, David Nez, Drago Dellabernardina

*Mount Triglav*, 1968

Performance

Zvezda Park, Ljubljana

Courtesy: Moderna galerija, Ljubljana



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**

*Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav* (detail), 2007

Digital print, triptych, 100 x 136, 100 x 142, 100 x 120 cm

⤵

**Irwin**

*Like to Like / Mount Triglav*, 2004

Photographic reconstruction of the OHO group action *Mount Triglav*

Color photo, 168 x 199.5 x 7 cm

Photo: Tomaž Gregorič

A Cornerhouse Commision

Courtesy: Galerija Gregor Podnar



⏪

**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**

**002199341 (Identity Card)**, 2007

Print on plastic, 5,4 x 8,5 cm



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**

**002199616 (Identity Card)**, 2007

Print on plastic, 5,4 x 8,5 cm

⏪

**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**

**002293264 (Identity Card)**, 2007

Print on plastic, 5,4 x 8,5 cm

Original lost; 2nd version:

**002359725 (Identity Card)**, 2008

Print on plastic, 5,4 x 8,5 cm

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	Hrvatín	
	Ime	Ema	
Oče	Priimek	Hrvatín	
	Ime	Vito	

Poznejši vpisi:  
Skenil zakonsko zvezo dne 17.11.1990.  
Zakonec: Bašić Hrvatín Sandra

Šifra: 7053

Datum: 30.07.2007

R00174632

MAT/REG-1



*Debeljak Maja*  
Priimek in ime matičarja

## IZPISEK IZ MATIČNEGA REGISTRA O ROJSTVU

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

### Podatki o starših

Mati	Priimek	<b>Giuliani</b>
	Ime	<b>Silvana</b>
Oče	Priimek	<b>Grassi</b>
	Ime	<b>Sergio</b>

## IZPISEK IZ MATIČNEGA REGISTRA O ROJSTVU

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

### Podatki o starših

Mati	Priimek	<b>Kariž</b>
	Ime	<b>Nuša</b>
Oče	Priimek	<b>Kariž</b>
	Ime	<b>Andrej</b>

**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**  
*Birth Certificate* (details), 2007  
 Print, triptych, 29.63 x 21.08 cm each



# Kunstauktion



Director of Sotheby's Austria Mag. Andrea Jungmann during the art auction  
Palais Sturany, Vienna, 2010  
In the framework of the exhibition *Hard to Sell, Good to Have*  
Curators: Alexandra Grausam, Elsy Lahner



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**  
*Signature (Konjsko sedlo), 2007*  
Signatures series  
Action

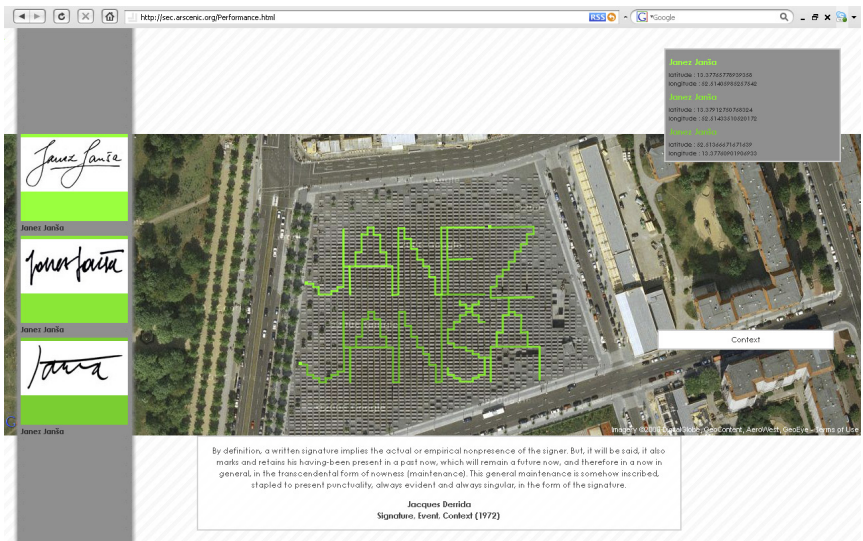




**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**  
*Signature (Walk of Fame), 2007*  
Signatures series  
Action



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**  
*Signature (Copacabana)*, 2008  
Signatures series  
Action



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**  
*Signature Event Context*, 2008  
 Performance  
 Holocaust Memorial, Berlin



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**  
*Signature (Kunsthaus Graz), 2008*  
Signatures series  
Action



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**  
*Signature (Monnaie de Paris), 2014*  
*Signatures series*  
Contribution to John Baldessari's *Your Name in Lights*  
Action



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**

**Signature** (detail), 2010

Acrylic on canvas, 9 triptychs, 50 x 70 cm each painting



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**

*Signature*, 2010

Acrylic on canvas, 9 triptychs, 50 x 70 cm each painting

Velja do / Valid thru 02/20



ZIGA KARIZ

VALID THRU 02/20



NLB /r/



5436 6120 0000 3736

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VALID THRU 06/20



ZIGA KARIZ

NLB /r/



4106 6900 1002 2823

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VALID THRU 08/20



ZIGA KARIZ

NLB /r/



4106 6900 1004 0957

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VALID THRU 10/20



ZIGA KARIZ

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ZIGA KARIZ

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Velja do / Valid thru 10/19



ZIGA KARIZ

NLB /r/



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ZIGA KARIZ

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VALID THRU 10/20



ZIGA KARIZ

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ZIGA KARIŽ

VALID THRU 08/20

VISA

ZIGA KARIŽ

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Maestro

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5156 0201 0275 8758 148

Velja do / Valid thru 12/20



NLB /o



5436 6120 0034 4106

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ZIGA KARIŽ

NLB /o



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ZIGA KARIŽ

NLB /o



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VALID THRU 11/20

VISA

ZIGA KARIŽ

NLB /o



Štečajna / Account No.  
5156 0201 0275 8758 148

Velja do / Valid thru 02/21



ZIGA KARIŽ

NLB /o



5436 6120 0031 8803

5436

VALID THRU 01/21



ZIGA KARIŽ

NLB /o

NLB /o

←

**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**

*All About You* (detail), 2016

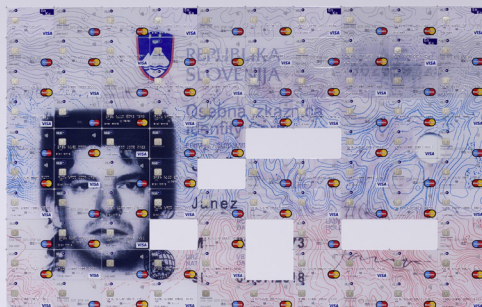
Print on plastic, triptych, 104 x 154 cm each



**Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša**

*All About You*, 2016

Print on plastic, triptych, 104 x 154 cm each



Robert Pfaller

ONE FOR ALL,  
ALL FOR ONE:

JANEZ JANŠA

*Theology*

*and Magic*

*of the Name*

*and Its Plural*

*“Faces and names, I wish they were the same  
Faces and names only cause trouble for me  
Faces and names  
If we all looked the same and we all had the same name  
I wouldn't be jealous of you or you jealous of me  
Faces and names  
I always fall in love with someone who looks  
the way I wish that I could be  
I'm always staring at someone who hurts  
And the one they hurt is me  
Faces and names, to me they're all the same  
If I looked like you and you looked like me  
There'd be less trouble you see”*  
Lou Reed, John Cale

*“What variety of herbs soever are shufed together in the dish, yet  
the whole mass is swallowed up under one name of a sallet.”*  
Michel de Montaigne

## 01

In the philosophy of Bertrand Russell we find the distinction between a *name*, for example “*Janez Janša*,” and a *denoting phrase*, for example “*politician*.”<sup>1</sup> The difference between a name and a denoting phrase is, of course, not adequately described by saying that a name designates only one single thing, whereas a denoting phrase denotes more than one. There are in fact denoting phrases which denote just one single thing, of which there can by definition not be more than one: for example, “the Prime Minister of Slovenia,” of which there can only be one. Yet despite its singularity, this is still a denoting phrase. For one can always ask the question: “Who is the Prime Minister of Slovenia?”

A denoting phrase designates a place, a position. And even if there is just one such place, or just one position, there can be multiple candidates for this position: for example, the previous Minister of Defense, or his party colleague, or the leader of their coalition party, etc. Or, in the analogous case of the singular position of the King of Norway, the candidate for this position may be a father, his son, or grandson, or nephew – or whoever else may occur next in the succession to the throne. Therefore, whenever there is just one place and yet it is still possible to ask the question who (from a number of possible candidates) occupies this place, we are dealing with a denoting phrase, and not with a name.

## 02

In pagan religions, the word “God” is a denoting phrase. Not only in the case in which there are many Gods, but also in the case in which

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<sup>1</sup> See Russell 1905.

there is only one God – for example, only one God of Commerce – one can always ask, “Who is your God of Commerce?” And there may be several candidates for this position, such as Hermes, Mercurius, etc. The transition to monotheism is made not when there is only *one God*, but when there is only *one candidate* for this position. Then it is no longer possible to ask, “Who is your God?” since there is only one possible candidate for this position.

This is why in monotheism “God” is no longer a denoting phrase, but a name. Only God is God; there is no other candidate for his job. Therefore, when asked, God desperately answers, “I am who I am,” etc. “God” is his name – a name that cannot be further explained by his position. Unlike mortal beings who can say things such as “I am Janez Janša, the ex-Prime Minister of Slovenia,” God cannot deliver his job description in order to make clear who he is, since due to his singular candidacy his job does not exceed his name. Just like in unfair job announcements which are actually only made for one specific candidate, also God’s job does not add anything new to his name – his whole job is his name.

### 03

Now we can understand the logical connection between the first two of the Ten Christian Commandments (in their Catholic version, since Slovenia is, if religious at all, arguably mostly a Catholic country) – the first of them meaning “that [followers] must worship and adore God alone because God is alone,” and the Second Commandment, which *prohibits the use of God’s name in vain*. When God is alone (First Commandment), in the strict sense of there being only one candidate for God’s position, then “God” is a name, and not only a denoting phrase, and therefore the Second Commandment protecting the name becomes necessary.

For only names have this sensitivity to them, which denoting phrases rarely have. One can tell, for example, a colleague from the university administration that his job as evaluation officer is a silly job, yet one has great respect for how sensitively he personally handles it, and that it would be completely different and utterly detrimental had any other candidate gotten this job. Yet in monotheism this is not possible. I cannot utter criticism of the position, but express respect for the way a specific candidate does the job (while imagining how badly other candidates would have done it). Since there is only one candidate, a monotheist God totally identifies with his job and takes every criticism of his job personally, as a criticism of the person connected to his name. The little humor that monotheist Gods regularly display with regard to any criticism or even witticism stems precisely from this inability to distinguish between person and role. Following Richard Sennett (Sennett 1977), who was well aware of Christianity's crucial contribution to contemporary culture's narcissism, we can say that monotheism by necessity amounts to a kind of divine "tyranny of intimacy."

## 04

Since, in monotheism, God is a name, also the son of God bears this name – the name of the father. Even if it is not so certain whether the son actually occupies the same position or does the same job (for example, because he instead claims to be just a mortal human being), the name of the son is "God," just as that of his father. The Holy Spirit, another relative of theirs, in a fancy feather outfit, also has the same name.

Since God has become a name, and not a position, in monotheism there can be even more than one bearer of this name. For obviously there can be several people bearing the same name; especially when



they are close relatives – for example, Henry the First, the Second, the Third, and so on. Even if there is just one king (position), there can be many people called Henry (name). While a denoting phrase is well able to denote only one single thing, a name, on the other hand, can well refer to a multiplicity of beings. The name has never been what naive theories of signification want it ideally to be. Far from ever functioning as a “rigid designator” and denoting only one person, the name has always functioned homonymically and designated many people. As Michel de Montaigne writes,

“Item, ‘tis a frivolous thing in itself, but nevertheless worthy to be recorded for the strangeness of it, that is written by an eyewitness, that Henry, Duke of Normandy, son of Henry II., king of England, making a great feast in France, the concourse of nobility and gentry was so great, that being, for sport’s sake, divided into troops, according to their names, in the first troop, which consisted of Williams, there were found an hundred and ten knights sitting at the table of that name, without reckoning the ordinary gentlemen and servants.”  
(Montaigne, *Of Names*)

## 05

From a theological point of view, it cannot be regarded as a coincidence that it was precisely *three* artists that in 2007 took on the name “Janez Janša.”<sup>2</sup> In a culture that for many centuries had been accustomed to the theological idea that three beings have to be regarded as one, it must have appeared most obvious that these three artists working in Slovenia now were one. It would actually be a kind

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2 This has been most clearly remarked by Lev Kreft, in: *NAME Readymade*, p. 169.

of blasphemy to keep on counting and say that there were now four of them. This would amount to the idea that besides God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, there was a fourth, i.e. God *sans phrase*. No, of course, there is not a fourth Janez Janša outside the holy artistic trinity; the three of them *are* Janez Janša. They do not “represent” him or “occupy his place” – for Janez Janša, after all, is a name, just like the name “God,” and the three above-mentioned divine Christian relatives do not occupy a place but bear the name of “God.” Under some aspects (which more refined theologians may be able to explain), God may appear as one; under other aspects God may appear as three. Let it be as it pleases, the important thing for us here is that exactly the same seems to be the case with Janez Janša. For one has always either seen one of them, or three of them, but never four. Significantly, even when the Janez Janša artists appear in a group photograph together with Janez Janša the politician, it is just two of them, while a third Janez Janša artist only figures as the author of the photograph. Instead of being the fourth, this last one can thus be seen as the name for the trinity – as the position from which the trinity can be perceived. There are three different figures (“Gestalten”) of Janez Janša, just as there are three different figures of God who nevertheless have to be understood as one.

## 06

Of course, in the Slovene official register of all citizen names, there may now be four, or even more Janez Janšas. The (more or less) holy *trinity* is not the only effect achieved by the brave Ljubljana art musketeers. Rather, what strikes one in the first place – and what is emphasized by the artists themselves in their uncompromised modernism – is the issue of *seriality*. They relentlessly produce more of the same, one after the other. Since, due to liberal Slovene laws, in the

1990s even the name of a person had entered the “age of mechanical reproduction,” the artists followed their mission and started reproducing. Their fidelity to Walter Benjamin’s claims consisted in the fact that also their reproductions were not to be understood as copies of a previous auratic original, but instead were themselves originals, each of them. Thus they were destined to reveal that aura did not pertain to any of them.

It has to be seen as an act of almost unprecedented modesty by the three Janez Janša artists to renounce their individual famous names Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi, and Žiga Kariž (a status which each of them had already previously achieved, in the sense of the phrase “making a name for yourself,” i.e. becoming famous<sup>3</sup>). If they had previously made a name for themselves, now they decided to un-make this name. Instead of insisting on their artistic uniqueness, each of them deliberately chose to be just one amongst others. This artistic modesty, on the other hand, did not leave the name of the politician Janez Janša untouched. Also this Janez Janša was now, all of a sudden, and visibly, just one amongst others.

## 07

Regardless of the fact that the three artists, due to their modesty, never made a particular point out of this,<sup>4</sup> one has to state that this outcome is not without a certain comicality. As Blaise Pascal has remarked,

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3 The well-known phrase contains a certain paradox: Once you “make a name for yourself,” the name becomes meaningful, and thus ceases to be a name in a strict, Kripkean sense, i.e. a “rigid designator.” For example, when Shakespeare had managed to make a name for himself, it became possible to ask whether some other author might be called “a second Shakespeare” or not, etc. The name had become a denoting phrase.

4 See for this Dolar 2014: 57f.

“Two faces which resemble each other, make us laugh, when together, by their resemblance, though neither of them by itself makes us laugh.” (Pascal 1958, § 133)

The mere proliferation of something is comical, since it always contains a certain suspended illusion, a certain “as if.” To put it into Octave Mannoni’s brilliant formula, “I know quite well, but still,”<sup>5</sup> we can say: *Of course we know that these are just two (more or less) different faces, but still we have to laugh, because due to the resemblance it looks as if one face were a comment, a parody or even a criticism of the other.*<sup>6</sup> In the same way, in the case of the proliferation of the Janez Janšas, we can say we know quite well that these are just several people with the same name, but still we are tempted to laugh a bit, since someone could have believed that one person was a comment upon some other with the same name. It is not us who believe in the commenting quality of one face (or one person) with regard to the other, but someone (a naive observer) could have believed in it, and our laughter stems from our superiority over the silly view of that naive other.

We are entering here the wide cultural field opened up by Mannoni which is not that of *faith*, or one’s own illusions, like religion, but instead that of *belief*—the structure that characterizes magic, i.e. illusions which always appear to belong to some naive virtual other; actually illusions without owners.<sup>7</sup> The clinical phenomena of fetishism and obsessional neurosis, the cultural structures around totem and taboo, as well as the aesthetic domains of the uncanny as well as the comical pertain to this field,<sup>8</sup> if not in general to the entire “magic,” the symbolic causality and power of art.

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5 See Mannoni 2003.

6 For this idea see Freud [1921c]: 96.

7 See for this Pfaller 2014.

8 See for this Pfaller 2006.

## 08

Seriality produces (amongst others) one aesthetic effect – comicality, which lies in the illusion of a commenting function of one serial item with regard to the other. Of course, this functions also in the relations between the three artists, an example being the marriage ceremony in 2007 in which they appeared as bridegroom and best men. Apparently nobody present could suppress a certain smile, since due to the seriality of the names, some naive other could have believed that each Janez Janša was a comment, or a better version and a possible replacement for the other, and that the whole thing thus was a polygamous marriage. This is how, in comedy, the issues of the double, or of seriality, and that of adultery or polygamy, none of which are by their very nature necessarily comical, are regularly linked together in a funny way.<sup>9</sup>

## 09

This comicality pertaining to the serial presentation of equivalent items has one additional reason in retroactivity. As Slavoj Žižek has nicely pointed out in an example,<sup>10</sup> whenever you try to put one grain of sand after the other on the table until they form a heap, you can always again remove the last grain and find out that it is still a heap. Hence the last grain – the one that appears to be crucial for forming a heap – retroactively makes visible the fact that even the corn before had already formed a heap.

The same goes for the Janez Janša project – for instance with the issue of the name-change. Replacing one name with another, or substituting one signifier with another, always leads, as Jacques Lacan has

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<sup>9</sup> See for this Dolar 2005; Pfaller 2014a.

<sup>10</sup> See Žižek 1991: 29f.

pointed out,<sup>11</sup> to a third signifier. The new signifier does not just neatly signify the old signified, as the old signifier had done. Rather, the new signifier now signifies the old signified, but also its old signifier, and the operation of substitution itself.<sup>12</sup> Therefore the signifier “Janez Janša” due to the name-change not only signified the people previously known as Davide Grassi, Emil Hrvatin, and Žiga Kariž; it also signified these signifiers, and, more importantly, it signified the name-change itself. “*Janez Janša*” from now on had to be read as (a signifier for) “*the one who changed his name (as a work of art)*.”

This is not without importance with regard to some subtle works stemming from the Janez Janša project which otherwise could easily pass unacknowledged. For example, when Žiga Kariž in an exhibition that shows his artwork *It's so Simple and that's the Way I Like it* (2005/2007) manually crosses out his name on the wall inscription to the artwork and replaces it by the new handwritten name “Janez Janša” (Künstlerhaus Graz 2007), this is not just a correction that any museum employee could have done just as well. Rather, it has to be seen as an artwork in its own right. This artwork nicely represents the artist's previous work of the name change; it is made by the artist's own hand, and it is signed. As a particularity, signature and artwork (apart from the handmade crossing bar over the previous name) almost coincide here – comparable to some of Cy Twombly's works such as, for example, *Virgil*, where the work and its title (again, a name!) also seem to almost coincide, a matter that Roland Barthes has beautifully commented upon (Barthes 1983: 19). Contrary to what the title of the (other) exhibited artwork promises, this is all but simple.

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11 See Lacan 1966: 515.

12 This is, by the way, the reason why the “politically correct” attempt at replacing bad words by good words always fails. The good word does not just signify the same thing as the bad word did before, but it signifies as well the bad word and the substitution. Thus, the good words regularly turn bad after a while.

Retroactivity showed its efficiency here, too. After the artists' gave the name "Janez Janša" the new meaning "*the one who changed his name (as a work of art)*," it became visible that also the politician with that name was himself someone who had changed his name – since his official name in his documents is "Ivan Janša."<sup>13</sup> Of course, the politician had not been as radical as the artists. He had not made "Janez Janša" his new, true, official name. In his case, it remained merely a nickname he used, albeit even for highly official matters. Retroactively, the Janez Janša project thus also made visible that the politician is an artist himself, too. Thus, it also became possible to distinguish between the different styles of these artists: while the three Janez Janšas belong to the field of contemporary art, where (even painful) truth and reality themselves appear on stage (for example, real blood, real sex, real names, etc.), the work by the other Janez/Ivan Janša has to be seen as belonging to the field of traditional art, confined to the boundaries of "representation and metaphor" – as the three Janez Janšas have perspicuously expressed in their interview with Lev Kreft.<sup>14</sup>

This comedy about the real renaming and the fake renaming also allows us to see the fact that Sigmund Freud has emphasized with regard to seriality:<sup>15</sup> a series always occurs in the place of a failure. The building of a series (for example, loving one woman after the other, as in the case of Casanova) becomes necessary when the original act (the incestuous relationship with the first love object) is regarded as a failure or has succumbed to repression. In the Slovene public space, a failed, traditional act of renaming caused its serial, and serious repetitions in contemporary art.

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13 See for this Dolar 2014: 34.

14 See Kreft, in: *NAME Readymade* 2008: 169.

15 See Freud [1912d]: 208.

## 10

The Janez Janša project's semiotic effects, of course, cannot only be read on the level of *seriality*, i.e. *syntagmatically* (or, as Roman Jakobson put it, *metonymically*) adding one equivalent item to the other. It also has effects that occur on the level of *metaphor*. The three artists, by sharing and reiterating one name, started together not only to stand *next to something*, but also *to stand for something* – for example, for exemplary Sloveneness. This can be seen not only as a reaction to political circumstances in Slovenia, but also as an ironic comment upon the increasing pressure exerted upon artists to represent some local cliché: artists from third world countries, for example, are most welcome in big international exhibitions today, albeit under the condition that they only tackle issues which are supposed to be theirs – matters connected to postcolonialism, racism, local production or struggle, etc. Nicolas Bourriaud has nicely analyzed this by stating that the politics of recognition of the other is in fact a machine of inferiorization, since it regularly subjects this very other under his folklore.<sup>16</sup> Yet this current habit of “branding” the other is not limited to artists from peripheral countries. It can also be observed, for instance, in German artist Jonathan Meese's performance “Usambaraveilchen” and the hilarious after-effects it had. This artist, well known and famous for his provocative dealing with the “Hitlergruss” and his claims for a “dictatorship of art,” in this particular performance just presented himself happy with drawing flowers for his mother. Precisely this absence of any provocation embarrassed the audience: “Wenn nicht gleich was Provokantes kommt, bin ich entrüstet.“ – “If something provocative does not appear soon, I feel indignation,” somebody was heard to state.<sup>17</sup> A minister for culture

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16 See Bourriaud 2007: 37.

17 See <https://www.welt.de/satire/article928442/Jonathan-Meese-verweigert-den-Hitler-Gruss.html> (accessed: 2017-07-29)



officially stated that the artist could not just do what he wants, since finally he had to recognize his responsibility for Germany as a location for culture, and for the many workplaces that are connected to that. And an arts expert explained accordingly that “Swastikas, the myth of Barbarossa, some sinister dealing with Richard Wagner and the like” were, after all, “what people wanted to see in art” – this had been “revealed by market analysis,” and it was “the unique selling point of German art.”<sup>18</sup>

The three artists’ taking on the name of the ruling Prime Minister of their country can thus be seen as performing a funny overconformity to this pressure of identity politics within the international art market. It represents exemplary “Sloveneness” – not only by using the most recognizable contemporary signifier possible for that issue, but also by making use of a new, very liberal Slovene law of renaming that had recently been introduced by Janez Janša’s government in order to allow people with less Slovene sounding names to take on a more Slovene sounding one.

## 11

On the other hand, the symbolic efficiency of this artistic act performed by the three artists formerly not known as Janez Janša obviously also concerns the figure of the Slovene politician. On the metaphorical axis, *it does something* – if not to the reality of the politician’s name, then at least to its appearance (in the eyes of some virtual naive other). Yet the same action would not have had the same impact had it concerned some other politician. It requires a certain feature on the side of its object. Only when there is a certain aspiration to uniqueness does the proliferation unfold its critical or comical effect.

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<sup>18</sup> See *ibid.*

Only when some people might be tempted to say, “there is only one...” (like in the famous Žižek joke about the phrase “there is only one mother”), is it significant to produce more of the same. Now of course, in this specific Slovene case there was such an aspiration, as Mladen Dolar, with reference to Lacan’s famous definition of the madman, pointed out.<sup>19</sup> The politician with the same name as the three artists attempted to be seen as THE politician of Slovene secession from Yugoslavia; when a French king once identified himself with the French state, many people in Slovenia now identified the politician with that frequent name not only with the state, but even with its independence. The Prime Minister thus appeared to stand beyond the law of this state whose independence appeared to depend on him. It appeared, as Zdenka Badovinac remarked, “as if all posts in the government were occupied by a single person.”<sup>20</sup> The Prime Minister thus became a kind of *primordial minister*, or primordial father.

The semiotic operation performed by the three artists was thus not just a naming, and not just a kind of mimesis either (mimesis always produces a copy in the sense of a fake, whereas the three artists produced a reality on a par with its original.). Instead, what the three artists performed was a “paternal metaphor”<sup>21</sup> – an operation well known in Slovenia, due to the lucky presence and amazing popularity of the Ljubljana Lacanian School. The paternal metaphor is an operation that replaces the threatening desire of the mother (or some other primordial agent) with the name of the father. Now, a primordial father is, as Slavoj Žižek has perspicuously pointed out, an instance of that very threatening maternal desire that precedes every sexual differentiation.<sup>22</sup> Replacing this threat with the name

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19 See Dolar 2014: 45.

20 Badovinac, in: *NAME Readymade* 2008: 60.

21 See for this concept Evans 1996: 140-141.

22 See Žižek 1995: “As the exemplary case of the exception constitutive of the phallic function, one usually mentions the fantasmatic, obscene figure of the primordial father-*jouisseur* who was not

of the father implies the installation of a symbolic order, an achievement that, in the psychic development of the individual, appears to repeat what was on the level of the social the famous issue of Freud's speculation: the murder of the primordial father by which a group of brothers introduces a law (the incest taboo) within their community. The brothers kill the primordial father and abstain from ever assuming the primordial father's position precisely by *taking on the father's name or sign* (the totem).<sup>23</sup>

Under this aspect it is important to see that the three artists did not just take on the same name that somebody else had taken on before them. Rather, *they all now stand for him*; the name now replaces a reality – or, since we are dealing with art, at least the imagination of such a reality. It is just the same semiotic operation that also currently occurs for example in university reforms: measures taken in the name of enhanced student mobility that miraculously damage this very student mobility. And when something like “quality management” takes over, then all quality disappears – due to a logic that can be called that of “bureaucratic nominalism.” Bureaucratic nominalism, too, performs the operation of the paternal metaphor. It retains a name, but averts a reality seen as threatening. When for example initiatives for “excellence” are launched, it is in order to prevent something so threatening as real excellence from emerging within the university.

The Janez Janša project can under this aspect be seen as an example of “apotropaic” art – a kind of magic that averts what one fears precisely

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encumbered by any prohibition and was as such able fully to enjoy all women. Does, however, the figure of the Lady in courtly love not fully fit these determinations of the primordial father? Is she not also a capricious Master who wants it all, i.e., who, herself not bound by any Law, charges her knight-servant with arbitrary and outrageous ordeals? In this precise sense, Woman is one of the names-of-the-father.”

23 An echo of this Freudian speculation, and a proof of its popularity amongst the European Left, appears in the song of the Fifth International Brigade from the Spanish Civil War: “Even the olives were bleeding/As the battle for Madrid it thundered on/Love and truth against the force of evil/Brotherhood against the fascist clan.” <http://www.irish-folk-songs.com/viva-la-quinta-brigada-lyrics-and-chords.html> (accessed: 2017-07-26)

by representing it. In this way the demons and monsters sculpted on the facades of gothic cathedrals were supposed to keep demons and monsters away. This apotropaic mode of operating has a long tradition in Slovene art. When, even before independence, the group “NSK/Laibach” developed styles of presentation that, in an over-affirmative way, recalled totalitarian, nationalist aesthetics, it thus largely kept at bay the emergence of such aesthetics in real Slovene political life. Every “Heimat”-oriented conservative group only coming close to such a formal language would have immediately been mocked as just a cheap copy of NSK/Laibach.

## 12

Many great artists in history have had a name containing the alliteration of two “Js”: James Joyce, Janis Joplin, Jasper Johns, Jacob Jordaens (the elder), Jacob Jordaens (the younger), Joseph Joubert, Jon Jost, Jason Jones, Jesse James, Jeremy Jackson, Jolanda Jones, Jacob Jensen, Julia Jentsch, Julia Jäger, Jolanda Jochachel, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, and Janez Janša.

There is definitely an advantage to having a name that combines poetic bliss with easy memorability (an attraction that may also have tempted Ivan Janša to change his name). Michel Montaigne has commented on this nicely:

“Item, there is a saying that it is a good thing to have a good name, that is to say, credit and a good repute; but besides this, it is really convenient to have a well-sounding name, such as is easy of pronunciation and easy to be remembered, by reason that kings and other great persons do by that means the more easily know and the more hardly forget us; and indeed of our

own servants we more frequently call and employ those whose names are most ready upon the tongue. I myself have seen Henry II., when he could not for his heart hit of a gentleman's name of our country of Gascony, and moreover was fain to call one of the queen's maids of honour by the general name of her race, her own family name being so difficult to pronounce or remember; and Socrates thinks it worthy a father's care to give fine names to his children."

But it is not only the pronounceability and similar advantages that give preferability to some names over others. Rather, there appears to be a certain magic pertaining to the name, a power proper to some names that obviously contradicts the alleged arbitrariness and indifference of the name as such.<sup>24</sup> Some names seem to *interpellate* their owners to go for greater aspirations in their lives (There seems, for example, to be a certain inevitable sexiness pertaining to names with alliteration – think, for instance, of sex symbols such as BB, MM, etc.) These names present, psychoanalytically speaking, an *ideal ego* to which the bearer of the name, whether he/she wants it or not, has to live up to. Montaigne makes this point as follows:

"A gentleman, a neighbour of mine, a great admirer of antiquity, and who was always extolling the excellences of former times in comparison with this present age of ours, did not, amongst the rest, forget to dwell upon the lofty and magnificent sound of the gentleman's names of those days, Don Grumedan, Quedregan, Agesilan, which, but to hear named he conceived to denote other kind of men than Pierre, Guillot, and Michel."

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24 See for this Dolar 2014: 13, 26, 54f.

Things may not always end as comically as in the one story that Montaigne reports:

“Item, ‘tis said that the foundation of Notre Dame la Grande at Poitiers took its original from hence that a debauched young fellow formerly living in that place, having got to him a wench, and, at her first coming in, asking her name, and being answered that it was Mary, he felt himself so suddenly pierced through with the awe of religion and the reverence to that sacred name of the Blessed Virgin, that he not only immediately sent the girl away, but became a reformed man and so continued the remainder of his life; and that, in consideration of this miracle, there was erected upon the place where this young man’s house stood, first a chapel dedicated to our Lady and afterwards the church that we now see standing there. This vocal and auricular reproof wrought upon the conscience, and that right into the soul; this that follows, insinuated itself merely by the senses.”

The effects may not always be as radical and as comical (since the religiously converted fellow eventually angrily “sends away” what appears to him to be the holy virgin) as in this case. But still the name inevitably appears to exert a certain magic, symbolic causality onto its bearer. The bearer as well as the surrounding people appear doomed to his/her name – an idea that has its most comical effects in Lawrence Sterne’s famous novel *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*. In this novel, the ego-narrator once states about his father, Walter Shandy:

“The hero of Cervantes argued not the point with more seriousness, – nor had he more faith, – or more to say on the powers of Necromancy in dishonouring his deeds, – or on

DULCINEA's name, in shedding lustre upon them, than my father had on those of TRISMEGISTUS or ARCHIMEDES, on the one hand, – or of NYKY and SIMKIN on the other. How many CAESARS and POMPEYS, he would say, by mere inspiration of the names, have been rendered worthy of them? And how many, he would add, are there who might have done exceeding well in the world, had not their characters and spirits been totally depressed and NIKODEMUS'D into nothing.” (Sterne 2005: 47)

The last idea is crucial, also with regard to the Janez Janša project. Even if we enlightened people may not feel as superstitious as we think people of former epochs may have been, we still would hardly be able to avoid a certain fear connected with unfortunate names. Nor would we be totally immune against the striking argument brought forward by Walter Shandy:

“Your son! – your dear son, – from whose sweet and open temper you have so much to expect. Your BILLY, Sir! – would you, for the world, have called him Judas?” (Sterne 2005: 47)

This is the crucial question. If some names inspire and challenge us to live up to an ideal, can others then do the opposite? And what would it mean to deliberately take on such a name, say, that of a convicted criminal? Can one also get doomed *to live down* to something like the opposite of an ideal?

## 13

Would choosing an unfortunate name not amount to at least as much fear as, say, writing an essay that consisted, for the world,

of thirteen chapters? Here we encounter a most respectable ethical quality of the Janez Janša project. The artists have proved ready to go to great pains for their art. Their work thus appears to belong not only to the field of *conceptual art*, but as well to that of what we may call *painful art*, art that usually gets identified with *body art* where the artists (like Günter Brus, Chris Burden, Marina Abramović, Franco B, Oleg Kulik) inflict wounds upon themselves, bear silence, darkness or isolation, or, on the contrary, naked exposure to the public for an incredibly long time. But, as the Janez Janša project demonstrates, not all pain is bodily pain. There is also the pain that some of the Janša artists had to endure when their parents started feeling grief about their sons' name-change (and thus apparently refusing the family name). There is the pain of losing a good part of one's singularity as an artist, by becoming exposed to confusion with at least two other living artists. And there is – not to forget – the painful real development that inflicts a lot of complication, bureaucratic problems, and efforts upon the private lives of the artists, while at the same time limiting their artistic possibilities for the future to a seemingly very narrow issue: for it appears difficult for the three Janez Janšas to ever produce works that do not somehow deal with the issue of their new name. Even if the artists have proved to be highly inventive with regard to the possibilities of this seemingly most restrictive rule, there must inevitably be some suffering involved in seeing one's productivity subjected to just one single signifier – how advantageous or disadvantageous this signifier may be. What may be political suffering for the people of Slovenia thus gets mirrored – and maybe even symbolically decathected – by the suffering of the artists. By the means of their art project, the three Janez Janšas “interpassively” seem to achieve what Sigmund Freud has nicely described as follows:

“...by this means patients are enabled to express in their symptoms not merely their own experiences, but the experiences of



quite a number of other persons; they can suffer, as it were, for a whole mass of people, and fill all the parts of a drama with their own personalities.” (Freud 1900: 149f.)

Of course it remains unpredictable as to what the vicissitudes of the name change in the future will be. If the artists’ desire to pursue their previous individual artistic work and career should ever become irresistible, there still remains a possibility – one that appears most worthy of the sphere of art and its “Cracowian”<sup>25</sup> ability to turn even the naked truth into a most deceptive fake: in that case, the three Janez Janša artists could start using their previous, true names as their *pseudonyms*.

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25 One may feel here reminded of the joke that Sigmund Freud comments upon – about two Gentlemen on a train: “Now see here, what a liar you are!” said the first one, bristling. “When you say that you are traveling to Cracow, you really wish me to believe that you are traveling to Lemberg. Well, but I am sure that you are really traveling to Cracow, so why lie about it?” (See Freud [1905c]: 109).

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**Slavoj Žižek**

**NAMES  
THAT  
DIVIDE**

When three Slovene artists legally changed their names to “Janez Janša” (the name of the main Slovene rightist politician, a cult figure for the anti-communist nationalists), what did they accomplish? Let’s take one of the three: he was Emil Hrvatin and became Janez Janša. It is crucial to see that “Janez Janša” never functioned as his nickname: he is now not “Emil ‘Janez Janša’ Hrvatin” (along the model of “Charles Lucky Luciano,” i.e., of a nickname inserted between the given name and the family name); he is not the same Emil Hrvatin whose defining quality is that he sees himself as another Janez Janša. “Janez Janša” is his (new) proper name, and “Emil Hrvatin” now functions as his nickname: when people hear “Janez Janša,” they ask “Which Janez Janša?” and (in this case) the answer is “Emil Hrvatin” – in short, “Emil Hrvatin” now functions as a nickname, so that the whole name is “Janez ‘Emil Hrvatin’ Janša.”

The precedents of such a reversal are quite illustrious. In the New Testament, Jesus is not called “the Son of God,” but much more regularly “the Son of Man” – why? The key is provided by the ironic fact that, owing to his immaculate conception, Jesus is precisely *not* a son of man, a human being whose father was a man. This is why the designation does not say “a son of man” (which would have simply meant a human being born of human parents) but “THE son of man”: the designation is not a predicate stating a fact, a property; it functions as a symbolic *title* (like a king who is “gracious, good, and wise,” even if he is a creepy idiot).<sup>1</sup> He is not a man who has the honorific title “Son of God” (as many figures in the Bible do), but *a god who has the title “Son of Man.”* This is why Paul, in an unusual formulation, doesn’t call Jesus *the* Christ (as a title, messiah), but simply “Jesus Christ,” as if “Christ” is his surname. In other words, if Jesus were to be a Scandinavian where the family name is usually formed by adding “son” to the father’s name, his complete name would not be “Jesus ‘Christ’ Josephson,” but “Jesus ‘Josephson’ Christ.”

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<sup>1</sup> See Reza Aslan, *Zealot* (New York: Random House, 2014), p. 138.

Such complications demonstrate clearly that conferring a name on someone is a very problematic and violent gesture which necessarily triggers a hysterical reaction. In the “revolutionary” 1960s, it was fashionable to assert perversion against the compromise of hysteria: a pervert directly violates social norms; he does openly what a hysteric only dreams about or articulates ambiguously in his/her symptoms. In other words, the pervert effectively moves beyond the Master and his Law, while the hysteric merely provokes her Master in an ambiguous way which can also be read as the demand for a more authentic real Master... Against this view, Freud and Lacan consistently emphasized that perversion, far from being subversive, is the hidden obverse of power: every power needs perversion as its inherent transgression that sustains it. In the hysterical link, on the contrary, the \$ over *a* stands for the subject who is divided, traumatized, by what for an object she is for the Other, what role she plays in Other’s desire: “Why am I what you’re saying that I am?” or, to quote Shakespeare’s Juliet, “Why am I that name?” What she expects from the Other-Master is knowledge about what she is as object (the lower level of the formula). Racine’s Phèdre is hysterical insofar as she resists the role of the object of exchange between men by way of incestuously violating the proper order of generations (falling in love with her stepson). Her passion for Hyppolite does not aim at its direct realization/satisfaction, but rather at the very act of its confession to Hyppolite, who is thus forced to play the double role of Phèdre’s object of desire and of her symbolic Other (the addressee to whom she confesses her desire). When Hyppolite learns from Phèdre that he is the cause of her consuming passion, he is shocked – this knowledge possesses a clear “castrating” dimension, it hystericizes him: “Why me? What for an object am I so that I have this effect on her? What does she see in me?” What produces the unbearable castrating effect is not the fact of being deprived of “it” but, on the contrary, the fact of clearly “possessing it”: the hysteric is horrified at being “reduced to an object,” that is to say, at being invested with the *agalma* which

makes him or her the object of other's desire. In contrast to hysteria, the pervert knows perfectly what he is for the Other: a knowledge supports his position as the object of the Other's (divided subject's) *jouissance*.

What, then, divides the subject? Lacan's answer is simple and radical: its (symbolic) identity itself – prior to being divided between different psychic spheres, the subject is divided between the void of its *cogito* (the elusively-punctual pure subject of enunciation) and the symbolic features which identify it in or for the big Other (the signifier which represents it for other signifiers). In Agnieszka Holland's *Europa, Europa*, the hero (a young German Jew who passes as Aryan and fights in the German Army in Russia) asks a fellow soldier who had been an actor before the war: "Is it hard to play someone else?" The actor answers: "It's much easier than playing oneself." We encounter this otherness at its purest when we experience the other as neighbor: as the impenetrable abyss beyond any symbolic identity. When a person whom I have known for a long time does something totally unexpected, disturbingly evil, so that I have to ask myself if I really ever knew him, does he not effectively become "another person with the same name"?

It is from this standpoint that one should reread the passages in *Richard II* which turn around *objet petit a*, the object-cause of desire. Pierre Corneille (in his *Médée*, act 2, scene 6) provided its nice description: "*Souvent je ne sais quoi qu'on ne peut exprimer / Nous surprend, nous emporte et nous force d'aimer*" (Often an I-don't-know-what which one cannot express / surprises us, takes us with it and compels us to love). Is this not the *objet petit a* at its purest – on condition that one supplements it with the alternate version: "and compels us to hate"? Furthermore, one should add that the place of this "I-don't-know-what" is the desiring subject itself: "The secret of the Other is the secret for the Other itself" – but crucial in this redoubling is the self-inclusion: *what is enigmatic for the Other is myself*, i.e., I am the enigma for the Other, so that I find myself in the strange position (like in detective novels) of

someone who all of a sudden finds himself persecuted, treated as if he knows (or owns) something, bears a secret, but is totally unaware *what* this secret is. The formula of the enigma is thus: “What am I for the Other? What for an object for the Other’s desire am I?”

Because of this gap, the subject cannot ever fully and immediately identify with his symbolic mask or title; the subject’s questioning of his symbolic title is what hysteria is about: “Why am I what you’re saying that I am?” Or, to quote Shakespeare’s Juliet: “Why am I that name?” There is a truth in the wordplay between “hysteria” and “historia”: the subject’s symbolic identity is always historically determined, dependent upon a specific ideological constellation. We are dealing here with what Louis Althusser called “ideological interpellation”: the symbolic identity conferred on us is the result of the way the ruling ideology “interpellates” us – as citizens, democrats, or Christians. Hysteria emerges when a subject starts to question or to feel discomfort in his or her symbolic identity: “You say I am your beloved – what is there in me that makes me that? What do you see in me that causes you to desire me in that way?” *Richard II* is Shakespeare’s ultimate play about hystericization (in contrast to *Hamlet*, the ultimate play about obsessionalization). Its topic is the progressive questioning by the king of his own “kingness” – what is it that makes me a king? What remains of me if the symbolic title “king” is taken away from me?

I have no name, no title,  
No, not that name was given me at the font,  
But 'tis usurp'd: alack the heavy day,  
That I have worn so many winters out,  
And know not now what name to call myself!  
O that I were a mockery king of snow,  
Standing before the sun of Bolingbroke,  
To melt myself away in water-drops!



In Slovene translation, the second line is rendered as “Why am I what I am?” Although this clearly involves too much poetic license, it does render adequately the gist of it: deprived of its symbolic titles, Richard’s identity melts like that of a snow king under sun rays. No wonder that Richard II is so devastated by being deprived of his symbolic title: he embodies the highest reliance on title, the belief that he is the chosen one, destined to wear the royal title. The defining moment of his life occurred when he was only fourteen, at the time of the Great Peasants’ Revolt in 1381. The rebels occupied most of London, posing a serious threat to the young king and his councillors who took refuge in the Tower. The king accepted their call to negotiations, and met them on Smithfield in the suburbs of London where he and his small retinue confronted around twenty thousand rebels led by Wat Tyler. In a small unexpected scuffle Tyler was killed and the furious crowd threatened to overrun the king and his men. At that moment of the highest tension, the young Richard did a totally crazy thing: alone, he rode towards the rebels, solemnly shouting: “I will be your chief and captain, you shall have from me all that you seek.” (Or something along these lines – the reports are conflicting.) The gesture worked, the rebels respectfully withdrew, and the threat was over. One should not miss the precise nature of the king’s move: immediately after the death of Tyler, the revolt’s leader, he imposed himself not only as the legitimate king but also as the true leader of the rebels themselves who would take care of them – his message was: “I am your true leader, not your opponent, so it is my duty to protect you, to be the voice of your grievances!”

A name thus functions as an exemplary case of what Lacan called “*le point-de-capiton*,” or “the quilting point,” which sutures the two fields, that of the signifier and that of the signified, acting as the point at which, as Lacan put it in a precise way, “the signifier falls into the signified.” This is how one should read the tautology “socialism is socialism” – recall the old Polish anti-communist joke: “Socialism is the

synthesis of the highest achievements of all previous historical epochs: from tribal society, it took barbarism, from Antiquity, it took slavery, from feudalism, it took relations of domination, from capitalism, it took exploitation, and from socialism, it took the name...” Does not the same hold for the anti-Semitic image of the Jew? From the rich bankers, it took financial speculation, from capitalists, it took exploitation, from lawyers, it took legal trickery, from corrupt journalists, it took media manipulation, from the poor, it took indifference towards washing one’s body, from sexual libertines it took promiscuity, and from the Jews it took the name. Or take the shark in Spielberg’s *Jaws*: from the foreign immigrants, it took the threat to small-town daily life, from natural catastrophes, it took their blind destructive rage, from big capital, it took the ravaging effects of an unknown cause on the daily lives of ordinary people, and from the shark it took its image. In all these cases, the “signifier falls into the signified” in the precise sense that the name is included in the object it designates – the signifier has to intervene *into* the signified to enact the unity of meaning. What united a multitude of features-properties into a single object is ultimately its *name*. (In a strictly homologous way, for Badiou, an Event includes its name in its definition.)

This is why every name is ultimately tautological: a “rose” designates an object with a series of properties, but what holds all these properties together, what makes them the properties of the same One, is ultimately the name itself. Imagine a confused situation of social disintegration in which the cohesive power of ideology loses its efficiency: in such a situation, the Master is the one who invents a new signifier, the famous “quilting point,” which again stabilizes the situation and makes it readable. The university discourse which then elaborates the network of Knowledge which sustains this readability by definition presupposes and relies on the initial gesture of the Master. The Master adds no new positive content – he merely adds a signifier which all of a sudden turns disorder into order, into “new harmony,” as Rimbaud

would have put it. Consider anti-Semitism in the Germany of the 1920s: the German people, following what they felt was an underserved military defeat, were disoriented, thrown into a period of economic crisis, political inefficiency, and moral degeneration – and the Nazis provided a single agent which accounted for it all: the Jew, the Jewish plot. Therein resides the magic of a Master: although there is nothing new at the level of positive content, “nothing is quite the same” after he pronounces his Word. Recall how, to illustrate *le point de capiton*, Lacan quotes the famous lines from Racine’s *Athalie*: “*Je crains Dieu, cher Abner, et je n’ai point d’autre crainte*” (“I fear God, my dear Abner, and have no other fears”) – all fears are exchanged for one fear, i.e., it is the very fear of God which makes me fearless in all other worldly matters. The same reversal that gives rise to a new Master-Signifier is at work in ideology: in anti-Semitism, all fears (of economic crisis, of moral degradation...) are exchanged for the fear of the Jew – *je crains le Juif, cher citoyen, et je n’ai point d’autre crainte*. And is not the same logic also discernible in a horror film like Spielberg’s *Jaws*? I fear the shark, my friend, and have no other fears.

One can also say that, in contrast to the particular features of a thing, the name is a symptom of the thing it names: insofar as it is a signifier which falls into the signified, it stands for *objet a*, the X, the *je ne sais quoi*, which makes a thing a thing. The name names the universality of a thing in its impossible objectal counterpoint. Recall again Lacan’s precise reading of Freud’s concept of *Vorstellungs-Repraesentanz*: not simply (as Freud probably intended it) a mental representation or idea which is the psychic representative of the biological instinct, but (much more ingeniously) the representative (stand-in, place-holder) of a missing representation. Every name is in this sense a *Vorstellungs-Repraesentanz*: the signifying representative of that dimension in the designated object which eludes representation, that which cannot be covered by our ideas-representations of the positive properties of this object. There is “something in you more than yourself,” the elusive *je ne sais quoi* which

makes you what you are, which accounts for your “specific flavor,” and the name, far from referring to the collection of your properties, ultimately refers to that elusive X.

Does not the formula of love – “You are... you!” – rely on the split which is at the core of every tautology? You – this empirical person, full of defects – are *you*, the sublime object of love, i.e., the very tautology renders visible the radical split or gap. This tautology surprises again and again the lover: how can you be *you*?<sup>2</sup> (But recall here the apparently opposite use of tautology in our everyday practice: when one says, “a man is a man,” this precisely means that no man is at the level of its notion, that every actual man is full of imperfections; or, when we say “the law is the law,” the implication is that we have to obey it even when it obviously violates our sense of justice – “the law is the law” means that the law is fundamentally grounded on an illegal violence.)

And this brings us back to our starting point. One of the strategies to cope with this gap that separates me from my name is to add another (secret) name designed to capture the core of my being which eludes my public name. In a recent German film about high-school delinquency, a gang member says to his apprentice: “My name is Jack. But you can call me Jack.” A nice play with tautology: in the closed gang universe, the norm is that one is not allowed to call the boss by his proper name, but only by his nickname: “My name is Jack, but you can call me Jacko!” – the pseudo-intimacy of this invitation to use the nickname implies the injunction to accept and participate in the relations of domination and servitude that characterize the gang universe. The permission to address the boss directly by his proper name is thus the highest privilege. Imagine God telling you, “My name is God, but you can call me God!” – something definitely much more frightening than “My name is God, but you can call me the Old One

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2 If, then, love is, as Lacan put it, giving what one doesn't have, how does a true Master who loves you give you what he doesn't have? He gives you, his pupil, *yourself*, the possibility to become what you are.

## NAMES THAT DIVIDE

in the Sky.” So which of the four Janez Janšas (the politician plus the three artists) would be able to say, “My name is Janez Janša, but you can call me Janez Janša”? The paradoxical answer is not the politician, but only the three artists.

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**Jela Krečič** is a Slovene journalist, columnist and philosopher. She writes for the largest national newspaper *Delo*. Her theoretical research focuses on films, TV series, the star system, and aesthetics, and she has published several studies on these topics. She also co-edited anthologies on contemporary TV series and on the comedies of Ernst Lubitsch (*Lubitsch Can't Wait*). She has published numerous essays on contemporary art, including an article on the Slovene artistic group NSK for the publication *Neue Slowenische Kunst – An Event of the Final Decade of Yugoslavia*, and an article on the Janez Janšas for the publication *Name Readymade*. Recently she also edited a volume of political theory, *The Final Countdown: Europe, Refugees and the Left*. Her literary debut *None Like Her* has been translated into English.

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## Janez Janša and Beyond

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REPUBLIC OF SLOVENIA  
MINISTRY OF CULTURE



City of  
Ljubljana

## Janez Janša and Beyond

In the summer of 2007 three artists from Slovenia legally changed their names to “Janez Janša,” the name of the right-wing Prime Minister at that time. Since then, the artists have presented their works as performances, exhibitions and a film documentary, and have continued with their investigation of “What’s in a name?”

Starting from this famous Shakespearian question, four eminent European philosophers – Austrian Robert Pfaller and Slovenians Mladen Dolar, Jela Krečič and Slavoj Žižek – confront the implications of the Janšas’ name change and its consequences in four essays. Ten years of artistic and real life activity, here illustrated by a photographic insert, presents an opportunity for them to discuss the symbolic power of the name, the ways it affects the subject and subjectivity, and how playing with names can lead to a radical critique of our late capitalist civilization.

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