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interview with Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša

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AL: Why did you decide to change your name into the former prime minister Janez Janša, all three of you? Was it done all at once? Why did you become also member of his Slovenian Democratic Party?

JJ: The reason for my name change is personal and rather intimate and I won't make it public.

JJ: I also did it for personal reasons.

JJ: It is technically not possible, it is not foreseen by the law, at least here in Slovenia, but I believe also anywhere else in the world, for individuals to change their name at once, collectively. So, we did not change our names at once but each one separately and in a different time frame. Although yes, we three changed our names one after the other, in the same month.

JJ: We decided to join the right wing SDS party, leaded by Janez Janša, as its slogan was "the more of us there are, the sooner we will achieve the goal!"

AL: Do you feel that it can be defined then as a "shared identity," or simply a propagation of the original idea in three humans? There was anybody else, as far as you know, that followed your example changing its name in Janez Janša too?

JJ: I reject the idea of "shared identity" as this would imply that the whole issue of identity has to do predominantly with one's people name. Name, in my opinion, plays a minor role in the definition of one's identity.

JJ: Juliet Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet* says: "It's only your name that is my enemy; you are yourself, not even a Montague. What's "Montague?" It is not a hand, or a foot, or an arm, or a face, or any other part belonging to a man. O, be some other name! What's in a name? That which we call a rose would smell as sweet if it had any other name. So Romeo, if he wasn't called "Romeo," would retain that dear perfection which he has without that title. Romeo, throw your name away; and for that name, which isn't part of you, take all of me."

JJ: Yes... "I take you at your word. Only call me "love," and I'll be baptized with a new name. From now on, I'll never be "Romeo."...

JJ: I'm not aware of any other individual in Slovenia who changed officially his or her name into Janez Janša, but there might have been cases where somebody started using this name as a pseudonym.

AL: Changing the name has been done repeatedly in the past by artists and activists usually to highlight something important or political. In your case there's any reference to the identity condition in Slovenia, a former Yugoslavia region and then among the first nations in the area to seamlessly declare its independence? And why did you call your process one of "visible disappearance"?

JJ: There is a rather direct reference to the issue of Slovenian national identity in our common project *Mount Triglav on Mount Triglav*. Triglav is the highest mountain in Slovenia and one of the most important Slovenian national symbols, appearing in the Slovenian coat of arms, on the flag of Slovenia and even on the Slovenian 50 Eurocent coin. Its name means literally "three-heads" and it derives from the shape of the mountain that has three peaks.

JJ: Immediately after changing our names, we climbed that mountain, repeating all the way up the mantra *Jaz sem Janez Janša* - my name is Janez Janša. Once on the top we covered ourselves with a huge black cloth letting only our three heads appearing through holes made in the fabric.

JJ: This project was actually the re-enactment of the performance *Mount Triglav* realized by the neo-avantgard group OHO in a central square of Ljubljana in 1968 and of the photographic happening *Like to Like/ Mount Triglav* done by the group Irwin in 2004, in the very same square.

JJ: to say it with the contemporary aestheticist and art theorist Miško Šuvaković these three works “are the most radical executions of the ‘political sliding sign’, that is, the individual explanations of symptoms of Slovene identity and, more importantly, the historical construction and realization of political identities.”

JJ: As a direct consequence of our name change it started a process of “disappearing”, in the sense that our previous names, around which we as artists worked intensively in the past for their establishment, were suddenly substituted by our new names. This happened also retroactively applying as well to our biographies and to our previous artistic works.

JJ: this was an “anti-market” move, certainly in conflict with any brand-related logic...

JJ: ... but, at the same time, the “name change gesture” created so much attention around us and around our work: a paradoxical situation we defined as “visible disappearance”.

AL: How much your change of name has impacted in your daily life? Your brilliant version of "hacking" the unique identifier system (principally based on names) also generated uncertainty and unexpected consequences? Is any of you planning to go

back to his previous name?

JJ: Generally speaking we are still functioning the same way as before the name change: same work, same friends... we are the same persons after all. Yet I have to say that the change of name also rendered communication very unstable right because of the "hacking effect" it has on the unique identifier system.

JJ: Not much changed for me at the intimate, introspective level, but it did change my relation with the immediate surround. The act of changing one's name is akin to the act of dying: it affects others far more than it affects you. The others are the ones who have to learn dealing with it. Similarly, when you die others have to deal with this fact and not you.

JJ: Yes, a personal name is a conventional label used by others to differentiate you by other subjects. Name is something that introduces an individual in a public stream. "Please, introduce yourself" means in fact "please, tell your name". But, how much personal is indeed a personal name if it has mainly a public function?

JJ: As an example of unexpected consequences I can tell you an anecdote. I have double citizenship: Slovenian and Croatian. For certain reasons, which are too long to be explained here, I had Slovenian documents but never had Croatian ones. Last year I finally decided to do them, but the public servant at my Croatian municipality rejected my request as I was listed in their registry under my old name and the only valid document in my possession to identify myself was the Slovenian passport which is issued to Mr Janez Janša. Despite these "little" inconveniences, I'm not actually planning to go back to my previous name.

JJ: I already did it last January. I changed back my name into Žiga Kariž.

AL: Why are you then answering to this interview as Janez Janša?

JJ: Cause now I use this name as a pen name to sign works, gestures and action I share with Janez and Janez.

AL: This name can maybe be seen as a fake only between the lines and its major strength is that it steps in a vast territory of ambiguousness. For example, were you ever approached mistakenly by people looking for the ex prime minister? And because sometimes your artworks were done by some or all of you, how did you handle references once the change of name took place?

JJ: No, it actually never happened that somebody would approach me thinking I'm the former prime minister. But it happened many times that somebody sent me congratulations or business proposals for a theatrical piece I never directed or for paints I never did...

JJ: Yes, you are right, it never happened to be approached mistakenly but once we were intentionally approached by the political weekly magazine *Mag* just before Slovenia's parliamentary elections in 2008. They were publishing interviews with all leaders of the parliamentary parties and when the leader of the SDS Janez Janša refused the interview we were invited to give an interview instead. This was a rare and exclusive situation when an interview with contemporary artists was published on political pages of a magazine.

JJ: Regarding references to our work after the name change we didn't really take any particular precautions. Art pieces done by the three of us were signed Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša, whereas works done individually were simply signed Janez Janša. We applied this logic to all works we did after the name change but also to all works done before.

AL: Another interesting aspect of fakes is that they belong to an original reference. In your case you are all new originals, but a special kind of originals, being proximal often physically but even more virtually, because of your work. How this affects the whole process?

JJ: I don't know if fakes are to be considered as "belonging to an original reference,,. One could say that fakes undermine rather the whole institution of "reference,, since they produce new links between names and objects, between names and things, and these new links call into question precisely the referential conception of language. It's an issue raised many times in the philosophy of language, as some critics and theorists, such as Aldo Milohnić and Antonio Caronia noted in the book *NAME Ready Made*. So, I'm not sure if this is the right key to *completely* understand our work, but it is certainly a legitimate viewpoint.

JJ: I don't agree so much to define the whole thing as a "fake,,. We did no fake, neither in the sense that we forged our names or our identity, nor in the sense that we "simulate,, to be someone else. We changed our names in a complete, legitimate and entirely legal way. But it's true that just this aspect of the matter affected the whole process, because it creates differences, ambiguities, and perhaps even inconsistencies between our new "official,, identity and the way people was used to deal with us. For me, this is the most interesting issue in this process...

JJ: ... and it's just the reason why it struck so much other people. It's clear that, from that moment on, every thing we do is linked to this new situation, to these new names. Obviously, people are beginning to get accustomed to that, but they'll never get to feel at their ease completely.

AL: I guess your documents, especially passports (the most iconic ones) easily

became a tangible object and so a controversial / objective part of your work. How did you use them or let them to be used? What about them being simultaneously perfectly authentic and a work of art?

JJ: With our gesture we introduced in the art world two new types of Readymade: the personal name as Readymade and personal identification documents as Readymade. We have decided to exhibit these art works in a solo show entitled *NAME Readymade* at the Steirisher Herbst Festival in 2008.

JJ: In the history of art, such readymades did not exist. Personal identification documents cannot “simply” be bought in shops, recontextualized, turned around and exhibited as Duchamp did with his *Fountain* for example. To obtain them, one has to initiate an administrative process. We consider them works of art precisely because they contain the procedure through which they were produced.

JJ: The original of *Fountain* has been lost, so Duchamp made new ones and signed them anew. We cannot make new documents just like that. They can only be made by the state following a specific administrative request...

JJ: They are not just any odd ordinary thing – they are not a urinal turned into "Fountain".

JJ: The exhibition *NAME Readymade* placed us within the relationship of power between the spheres of art and administration. If you don't carry your documents on you because they are locked up in a gallery space as art works, then you cannot function normally in the society because you lose certain basic human rights such as the freedom of movement for example. You technically become a *sans papier*.

JJ: Exhibiting our documents in glass cabinets has not stripped them off their status as ordinary things. They remain valid administrative documents in glass cabinets as anywhere else. And this is another key difference between our Readymades and Duchamps' ones. Ordinary objects entering the art world do not go back to their previous reality and function. Our Readymades instead are trapped in between two realities and can't really leave completely one in favour of the other. This situation makes them uncommodifiable objects as they cannot enter the art market without actually crashing with the fact that it is illegal to sell valid identification documents...

AL: On Wikipedia, that is usually very careful about entries, you all have an entry, although clearly disambiguating the politician's one. Was it a streamlined process or did you face any problem? There's any other system that was reluctant to identify you as you actually are?

JJ: Apparently there was no problem to create 3 entries for us on Wikipedia. But I can't tell whether this was a streamlined process or not as I don't know who did them.

JJ: Still, I noticed that initially the disambiguation note stated at the top of the politician's

entry was “For other persons named Janez Jansa, see Janez Jansa (disambiguation)”. This led Wikipedia users to a disambiguating page where all 4 Janez Janša were listed.

But, later on, someone changed the disambiguation note into “"Janša" redirects here. For other uses, see Janša (disambiguation)”. This new link lead to a disambiguating page where many people with the surname Janša are listed making our own entries more difficult to find.

JJ: but there are many other examples of systems reluctant to identify us with our new names. One is the case of the Slovenian Mladinska knjiga’s *Leksikon osebnosti* (Who’s Who directory) where editors insisted that we should appear as entries under our former names...

JJ: ...not to face the uncanny situation of having to list four Janez Janšas one after another in the directory...

JJ: then there were quite some situations where hosts of international festivals or art events insisted, for opportunistic reasons, in promoting our work using our old names claming that local audience knew us better this way.

JJ: recently it also happened that two of us supposed to flight together to Lisbon to attend an artistic event. Electronic flight tickets were bought for us by the organizer of that event. Well, at the check-in desk we suddenly learned that the computerized system of the TAP flight company automatically deleted one of our tickets as it assumed it was a case of double-reservation.

AL: What's the legacy with the historical Monty Cantsin and Luther Blissett collective names creation and actions? What's the crucial difference, instead?

JJ: Many people make this connection at the first approach. We did closely follow Luther Blissett in the '90 and were all familiar with Neoism when we changed our name. So, perhaps a certain tribute should be paid by us to this movement. Still, I believe differences at stake here are substantial and more relevant than similarities.

JJ: Luther Blissett and Monty Cantsin are names informally adopted and shared by hundreds of artists and social activists. They are pen names, pseudonyms. In our case we changed officially our names so, when I say “my name is Janez Janša”, this statement is absolutely accurate also from the administrative point of view. So, the case of Luther Blissett was similar to our only in that it involved the assumption of the name of an actually existing person (Luther Blissett was a football player and Janez Janša the Prime Minister of the Republic of Slovenia) but it differs diametrically when it comes to the point of pseudonyms vs. namesake.

JJ: It is to say that our gesture introduced the category of namesake in the concept of multiple name.

AL: And what about your experience in relationship with the online territory where the sign and signifier can easily be interchanged, forged and modified at will?

JJ: In a sense, there's not so much difference between the network world and the real world for that matter, mainly because many of the people we deal with on the internet are the same we deal with in the real life.

JJ: On the net it's easier to forge one's identity, to build totally feigned and dummy situations, even to hide oneself behind a wall of images and words. And this is easy because you lack a clear reference to the body. Everything can be forged on an Internet site, even our performance *Signature Event Context* could have been made in a completely different situation from the one we reclaimed. But, if you think about it, it is basically the same situation we are facing with the language. There are always social conditions that warrant the correspondence of words to facts.

JJ: After all, for all the easiness to change and even mystify the link between signifier and meaning, everyone in the end believes that signs are more or less faithful representations of the real. Even on the Internet.