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All About Janez Janša

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ABSTRACT. In 2007, Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi and Žiga Kariž changed their names in Janez Janša. Janez Janša and Janez Janša. In 2009, Žiga Kariž changed his name again, from Janez Janša back to Žiga Kariž. When this change occurred, the most well-known and prominent of five previous Janez Janšas in Slovenian census was Janez Janša - the head of government from 2004 to 2008. At a time when they took (t)his name president Janez Janša figured as the political enemy of alternative culture and its artivist engagement. But three new-born Janez Janšas announced that their change of names is an intimate decision and not a public statement or even an act of artivism. The most interesting part of their collective projects is the use of names as ready-mades: *Name Readymade*, *Signature*, and *All about Us*. The first one (2008) turned their valid personal documents into works of art. The second one (2010) exhibited their signatures portrayed by another artist and authorized by all three Janšas, thus getting in touch with Derrida's deconstruction of identity and identification. The third, most recent one (2016) presented their identity cards constructed of their personalized credit and debit cards. All three projects deal with identity, with means of identification, and with exposed metaphysics and fetishism of personal documents as a special kind of »ordinary thing«, at the same time confirming and denying that »individuals are systems of representation«. (Danto, 1999, 12) In this presentation, I will concentrate on two of most interesting topics this project triggered: name and personal documents as ready-mades; and explanation of alternative culture's/artivist artworld's anxiety, discomfort and aversion to this project.

1. Introduction

Janez Janša, right-wing politician and president of the Slovene Democratic Party, became Prime Minister of Slovenia in 2004, and immediately attracted attacks from liberal and leftist artistic community. Both Janša and

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artistic community had roots in post-socialist struggles of the 1980s, when Janša was arrested by Yugoslav People's Army to become a symbol of Slovene fight for independence, and when so-called alternative culture was one of the most important subversive actors of civil society. Their mutual aversion developed when, after independence of 1991, Janša became right wing politician, and alternative culture transformed itself into contemporary artivistic community[2].

2. Renaming

In 2007, Emil Hrvatin, Davide Grassi and Žiga Kariž changed their names in Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša. In 2009, Žiga Kariž changed name again, from Janez Janša back to Žiga Kariž. They explained that the act of re-naming was an intimate decision, but added (in letter to the Prime Minister Janez Janša) that they are artists through and through, without any divide between their intimate and artistic existence.

Their decision became news. General public understood it mostly as artists' way to publicity; the artivistic subdivision of the artworld was repulsed by their intimate decision, unable to understand why formal and

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[2] Artivism (art + activism) is a collective label for contemporary approach to art which, conflating art and political rebellion joined anti-globalist movements as their artistic division, expressing itself in predominantly humorous, ironical and sarcastic tones. Now, it covers much broader field of civil society uprising against authoritarian regimes, austerity politics, pollution and destruction of environment and other targets. Artivism belongs to this field but insists on the political potential of artistic act. In post-socialist countries like Slovenia artivism developed directly from artistic strategies and tactics which were produced during post-socialist artistic activism of the 1980s, taking their experiences and aesthetic tactics as a strating point. However, this tie became less and less important until it changed considerably after outbreak of the global crisis which demanded invention of new approach. It is typical for artivism that it involves, beside art and activism, a continuous engagement with theoretical issues which exceed routine transportation of radical concepts from science to art, to ented the realm of scientific research as such. Among these efforts we can now find numerous examples of critical aesthetic research aimed at those issues which concern critical capacities of art and aesthetic potential for activism. The case of Janša's is specific and interesting because three artists are artivists with their own agendas, while their colective involvement with artistic projects starting from renaming on does not show direct activist engagement, but demonstrates how theoretical (political, economic, cultural...) issues are woven into the fabric of art.

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real change of their names was necessary. They thought that to take the name of Prime Minister could be a good pretext for making fun of him, to imitate him in caricaturized representations, and to expose his politics as right wing populism seasoned with aversion to art and culture. But which imitator or caricaturist takes the name of his target for real?! Before changing names, three artists knew each other and worked together on a few occasions, but they had different individual careers. Emil Hrvatin was theatre director and actor, and director of the *Maska* (Mask) Institute for performing arts in Ljubljana. Davide Grassi was conceptual artist and performer, and an investigator of virtual reality together with its controlling and surveillance use, who founded Institute for Contemporary Art Aksioma in Ljubljana. Žiga Kariž was visual artist active on the crossroads of classic and new artistic media who became professor of painting at the Academy of Visual Arts and Design in Ljubljana. After renaming procedure, they continued to follow their individual careers under new names. At the same time, not too often but regularly they appeared with group projects which involved names with their ready-made and symbolic value.

3. Works, Performances, Events

In January 2008, at Transmediale in Berlin Janša trio performed two connected projects under the title "Signature Event Context" with obvious reference to Derrida's text. The first one was to sign live all 1000 copies of Transmediale book *Conspire* (Kovatz and Munz, 2008) on blank pages usually provided for reproductions of artists' works. A performance of signature turned the book itself, as they themselves explained, into performance as a place which can leave only traces of its own disappearance. Their signature was performed as means of authentication. Authentication of what? Of a blank page as an artwork made by one of three Janšas respectively, or, of signature itself as an artwork? If artwork appears in performance, signature as performance is an artwork; if artwork is artefact, blank page is this artefact, and its authentication is confirmed by authors' signature. Performances are not collectible, artefacts are. Tjose who have Transmediale Conspire book signed by Janšas have ban authenticated

document of performance which, alas, can leave only traces of its own disappearance, but they also have an artefact consisting of nothing else but authenticating signature. This duality depends on the point of view. They are as proverbial duck and rabbit, only that they are not an illusion – both views are true. The second and connected project was to enter as *flaneurs* into the Memorial of the Murdered Jews of Europe at 00:01 am, and walk through it each one constantly repeating "My name is Janez Janša!", keeping GPS device on mobiles to trace their way, which inscribed the name Janez Janša on Google map. Allegedly Jewish community protested against such desecration (but it might be that other pressures were made from the German side to prevent such protest). Anyway, the curator banned the performance. Severe protests against such censorship followed, and finally it was allowed to show the documentation of the performance at the *Conspire* exhibition curated by Nataša Petrešin Bachelez, herself Slovenian art critic and curator from Slovenia leaving in Paris. Three Janez Janša performers realized their project during a night before the opening anyway, and anybody could follow it on his or her mobile. Performances cannot be repeated, being each time different even when repeating previous pattern. It seems that this one will remain even more unique because the Memorial is now secured and guarded, and midnight visitors are not allowed. The Memorial came into existence after years of political and cultural debates which in spite of its realization left unanswered question: are we still capable of materializing and at the same time symbolizing our collective memory into a memorial? Janšas provided positive answer authenticating the Memorial with their body-movement signature, through murmuring of their names and through virtual mapping which inscribed their names on Memorial's GPS map. It was not an authenticated appropriation of the Memorial as their work of art. It was an adoption of memory in question (*shoah*, or Holocaust) and its authentication. From 2007 on, Janšas left their signatures on many locations and with different means on Slovenian mountains' slopes and at the Hollywood Walk of Fame, at Copacabana beach and within Ars Electronica in Linz. On each occasion, it was purely conceptual act of performance leaving material or digital signature as a trace and document, involving all paradoxes mentioned by Derrida including

context which, in spite of conceptual purity functioned as a starting point of manifold conflicting political and cultural subcontexts. Nerlin example is undoubtedly the most successful project of this kind.

In October 2008 at the Steirischer Herbst in Graz, the exhibition "NAME – readymade" showed their old and new documents from identification cards and passports to credit cards. Under the same title Modern Gallery of Ljubljana published a book of texts of Slovenian and international specialists from the artworld (Lukan et al., 2008) to explain, comment, interpret and evaluate name as readymade artwork. In addition, there was an interview with three Janšas by Lev Kreft. This interview later appeared in Byproduct – a book on artworks which aside of their most visible and direct intention produce a number of other by-products. (Jahn, 2010, 123-131) Name here means, of course, the association of family name with given name. This association is like a definition consisting of *genus proximum* and *differentia specifica*. Family name as the nearest line of origin together with given name as special individual characteristics are not signs of something substantial like property of a person. As any other definition, they are classifying instruments, a construction. They signify something "the eye cannot descry", (Danto, 1964, 580) therefore they are of the same general class as artworks. To use name as readymade, and to present by-products of this use as artworks intersects three other coordinates used to define shifts in the status of art: descent from art to life, transfiguration of ordinary thing into artwork, and commodity status of the artwork. To change three different names of three individual artists into one and the same name taken as a readymade is a move in direction contrary to the usual artistic longing to make your name a brand. In this case, a name already used by some other inhabitants of Slovenia including its Prime Minister (which made it a political brand) was chosen by three persons well known at least in Slovene artistic community (again, an existing artistic brand). By that, they put their already achieved branding away and endangered their artistic status through visible political over-identification, be it negative or positive. A change of name does not harm one's identity at all, but it results with troubles of identification. That is nothing new. John Smith or Janez Novak (most common combination of personal and family

name in Slovenia) having the same name experience it all the time. It is nothing new to change the name officially if local legal system allows such move. For instance, liberal Slovenian legal attitude towards name changing allowed many non-Slovenian citizens or residents of other Yugoslav nations' origin to change their names after independence of 1990 into more Slovenian sounding names to avoid discrimination. What is new is to use this change and its by-products as a vehicle of artistic research of the concept and institution of art together with research of the concept and institution of name and personal document.

Avant-garde descent from art to life (Bürger, 1974) does not apply here, and neither does its reversal, i.e., a climb from life into art. Being valid personal documents, they remain part of life. Being art, their life materiality should not define what their artistic essence is from and about. But that is exactly what happens. They are art and life at the same time. As documents (presumed to be a kind of ordinary things) they were turned into art. Still, this did not happen through a choice made by the artist (as in Duchamp's case) but through procedure of authorities which issued these documents. Then, they became artworks, but not because they were exhibited in the artworld institution. They became artworks because the procedure of changing names is revealed to be an artistic performance process. Documents of this change are at the same time valid documents of life (an intimate decision of three artists) and valid artworks. But are their documents ordinary things? Not really. As proved by written statements of two governmental authorities, ministry of culture and ministry of interior, these documents are owned by the state and possessed by entitled persons, so that they cannot be alienated from them (as said the statement by the ministry of interior), and feature at the same time as artworks with their artworld status and art market value (as decided by the ministry of culture). This ambivalent and bifocal position of the executive conditions a messy outcome. The documents - artworks may be bought by a museum or private collector, but they can just be owned and not possessed. The owner who bought them can get them in possession only when documents' validity expires. Then, however, they are not artworks but just documents of a one-time performance. They do not behave like commodities do. They are

commodities only because or when they are artworks, and after expiration of documents when they still are documents of artistic performance. Artwork is a personal document authenticated with artist's signature and protected by law which becomes "atmospheric" (Danto, 1964, 580) commodity; personal document is a document of authentication – identification issued by authorities whose turning into commodity is forbidden by law. The relationship between authority issuing personal document and person using it for identification is similar to the relationship between author and his or her artwork. Author authenticates his or her artwork, but at the same time loses control over its understanding and interpretation. In case of the documents, persons are authenticated by their documents, but documents cannot control what happens with persons after they are authenticated. State as documents' owner can't even control transubstantiation of documents themselves into works of art, it can just play the game of duck and rabbit within its own premises.

4. Name Ready-Made and a Signature, Even

On the exhibition in 2010, there were twenty-seven paintings with four variations in names Davide Grassi, Emil Hrvatin, Janez Janša and Žiga Kariž. On paintings are their signatures and their autographic signatures put in a place where authorization is expected. The process of creation of these paintings consisted of few phases. First, three Janšas had to provide their signatures to Viktor Bernik, and (as the usual bourgeois clients) ordered their portraits, pardon, portraits of their signatures done in monumental dimensions (50 x 70cm). Second, Bernik provided these paintings as ordered, without any idiosyncratic addition of his own genius, and, in spite of being known as author of these paintings did not authorize them. Third, Janšas authorized these paintings *manu proprio* (with their own hand, in their own writing), using their previous and their new names in nine variations, each one authorizing painting of his own signature, each one authorizing painting of signature of the other, all three authorizing each painting of one of their three signatures together, and each one authorizing painting of his signature as Janez Janša with their previous names (Emil

Hrvatin, Davide Grassi) or re-obtained previous name (Žiga Kariž). Their signatures are grouped in threes providing nine triptychs. The first one is signed by Janez Janša the First, the second by Janez Janša the Second, and the third one by Janez Janša the Third who is not Janez Janša anymore but Žiga Kariž. The third one is therefore signed by pseudonym (if seen as authorization), or, it is a fake (if seen as authorization). The fourth triptych is signed by all three Janez Janšas. The fifth is signed by Emil Hrvatin, the sixth by Davide Grassi, and the seventh by Žiga Kariž. These are their previous names and in case of Žiga Kariž actual name as well; the situation complicates then fact that Davide Grassi remained Davide Grassi as Italian citizen because he was not granted to change his name in his native country. The eighth is signed by all three of them on each painting with their original names. The ninth finally has signatures which are acceptable as their identification in Slovenia at the moment of exhibition: Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Žiga Kariž.

These artworks are self-portraits: if Van Gogh's shoes are his self-portrait given as an ordinary thing which symbolizes his artistic career, here we have to deal with artists whose artistic career can be symbolized by their names and the process of their names transfiguration into ready-made artworks. These names play a game of their own sliding between artistic authorization and identification, between original and copy (or even fake and forgery), telling a story of their life through their signatures. Altogether, we watch a performance of nine triptychs as narration of their artistic biographies, as authentication of their portraits by Viktor Bernik as self-portraits, and of identification of each of them presented as a work in progress which can never find final safe haven.

In 2016, they presented their most recent project "All About You".[3] Three persons exhibit a triptych consisting of reproductions of their identity cards composed as a puzzle – a construction of one hundred Visa, MasterCard and Maestro cards issued in accordance with the personalization project of NLB Bank, each one representing a piece of identity card. The

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[3] In accordance with their practice to combine exhibitions with printed and digitalized theoretical interpretation, the text of a lecture given at the opening appeared as a book. (Kreft, 2016)

construction contains some blank spaces where bank cards were not issued because the request did not fit the bank rules. To get one hundred bank cards they had to apply for each one separately, proposing design of it with another 1/100th piece of their identity cards, and when they got the next card previous one expired. The result was that image of their identity card contained one to three valid bank cards (Visa, Master and Maestro). The process of making the triptych was a long-duration performance full of expectations and suspense for them, and they enjoyed it.

Bank cards are today as ordinary as Coca Cola or Brillo boxes were sixty years ago. Duchamp's ready-mades turned into artworks served his intention to restrain art's inclination towards aesthetic pleasure and contemplation. Warhol's artworks represented what was extraordinary about ordinary things – their attractive image. This work is neither ready made in Duchamp's sense nor in Warhol's sense. It is not ready made artwork of Duchamp's kind because it does not appear as artwork after it ceased to be ordinary thing – it remains ordinary thing even as it becomes an artwork. It is not a case similar to Warhol because it is not a portrait of document's commodity appeal – documents do not possess such an appeal but represent political, economic and social relationship between bank and its client, or state and its citizen. If not similar to Duchamp's or Warhol's procedure, it is surprisingly parallel to Picasso's *Guernica*. If the president of board of New Ljubljana Bank visited the exhibition and asked "Who made this?" the true answer would necessarily be: "You did." The triptych encompasses several social relations objectified in bank- and identity-cards: money, personhood, identification and citizenship.

Bank-card is itself just a representation of money which is originally just another commodity, then gold and other special representations start to represent money; and after that representation develops into a written or printed document saying that bank is ready to pay put denominated amount in gold. Still later, the same document without golden promise appears, and following that we get at a bank-card, to get transfigured into a personalized bank-card, until it will be (and is already getting) replaced by completely digitalized and virtual presentation of person's active financial power. During this historical process, money has lost its empirical material reality

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and became abstract power represented by its aesthetical attractiveness, travelling and transforming itself into what it really is: an abstraction from and of social relations which, once again, "the eye cannot descry".

Personhood is originally a theatrical mask on human face. It is neither just a mask nor just an actor. It is an actor wearing a mask impersonating this or that part. Artist is one of possible parts in *dramatis personae*. The person of artist to appear as an artwork is the embodiment of the modernist idea of art. This is not what is going on here. Subject may be just a figure of speech, but person is a figure of live performance. Personalization is proceeding according to bank rules, and through such personalization identity cards appear as a result constructed from ideal grip on credit and debit changes which constitute person's social power. Personalization of credit and debit equals identification tool. This tool is at the same time an artwork which represents person in its citizenship part with some of identifying data. The triptych as artwork was decomposing itself constantly during its productive performance because while new valid cards arrived, all those already included in the artwork expired, and so will the last now still valid card expire in due course. Artwork will turn into a document of once existing artwork, and documents will be invalid, both sides dying at the same moment – but for the auto-portrait appearing as a document of identification. It represents a self-portrait of a person wearing a mask of a citizen with the Republic of Slovenia used as a mirror.

6. Artivism's Uncanny Response

The effect of their intimate decision to change names was temporary political attention. What remained after that was discomfort, even aversion to their metamorphosis and their collective projects from artivist artworld where they nevertheless belonged before and after renaming. Aversion to their change of names could be caused by belief that they wanted an easy way to publicity, or, that they crossed the line between art and politics. On second thought, it has to be more than that because many similar projects were accepted and even applauded – but in those projects names were not changed »for real«. Why "real", i.e. legal change of name declared to be just

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an intimate decision disturbed the artivistic artworld so much?

The distinction between modernist *end* (*telos*) and artivist *cause* belongs to divide between art and life which, in case of modernism, supports art's ability to enter life with the real power because it has autonomous power of its own, while in case of contemporary artivism the power lies in choice of the »cause« which lies outside art. Artivism as a recent phenomenon combines art and activism in a social environment constructed after the fall of the wall, the fall of the twins and the fall of the Lehman Brothers. From ex-socialist point of view it is at least a decade older because of the function art had in deconstruction of socialist ideology and its societal fictions.

As Gauguin reports, van Gogh was painting shoes during their stay in Arles. Asked about it, he explained that he wore these shoes during his journey from Netherlands to Belgium after his decision that humanity cannot be saved through priests of religion but only through priests of art. He declared himself to be the Holy Spirit, i.e. the spiritual guide of humanity after Christ left for heavens. Shoes, in this case definitely his own pair of shoes, were not just still life with a personal object (Shapiro,1989, 305-306; Shapiro, 1994, 143-144), neither were they an auto-portrait as a worn-out personal object. They were an image of the cross an artist has to carry to execute his mission.

Artivism, as contemporary phenomenon, comes after Adorno and after Danto. Adorno claimed that nothing concerning art, not even its right to exist, is self-evident. (Adorno, 1974, 9) Art cannot justify its doings from its own end in an autotelic manner. Danto claimed that with its end being lost, art arrived into a situation when it could finally define itself without any ideology or philosophy which disenfranchised it before. (Danto, 1998, 63-89 and 115-128) Using this freedom, Warhol, he says, could turn ordinary things into works of art because what defines an artwork is something extra-ordinary which an eye cannot descry. (Danto, 1964, 580) Transfiguration of the ordinary into art proceeds without need to apply modernist laws of progress. In addition, explaining art after the end of art (or after the end of art history, i.e. arts progressive ideology) Danto declared that art cannot make anything happen. (Danto, 1998, 63-64) But, he asked

himself, why then philosophy (at least that of Plato and his later followers) thinks that art is dangerous? (Danto, 1998, 77-80) Artivism is trying to make something happen by accepting one or the other cause as a surrogate (*Erzatz*) for the modernist autotelic end: art does not have an end in itself, and may consequently embrace any possible cause. Doing that, it keeps up appearances of its modernist redemptive mission. Using Ulrich Beck's proposal, the relationship between van Gogh's and artivist relationship to art's mission is a relationship between the first and the second modernity. (Beck and Grande, 2010) Here, at this point, Janšas touch the nerve.

The name seems to be something ordinary at first, given to us by the others, usually parents. We grow into it. We may use it shortened, nicknamed; we can change it using aliases, pseudonyms, and so on; and so can the others, calling us other names. The name given at baptism and chosen by the baptized himself or herself has (and it definitely had with early Christians) another meaning. It is a gesture of baptizing oneself, leaving one communion that of the family, to get into another – in this case that of the artworld. The name ready-made serial artwork of Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša or Žiga Kariž does repeat a move which transfigures ordinary thing into artwork, but it does also the reverse at the same time, turning artwork into an ordinary thing. It turns their life into artistic existence, but it also turns artistic existence into ordinary everyday existence. The result is a bit offending for the artworld. Duchamp transfigured *pissoir* into artwork. To turn it back into *pissoir* by installing it into the nearest museum water-closet would be an intervention of uncultivated moron (or perhaps of Russian scoartist). Warhol transfigured Brillo boxes from an ordinary box into a container of celebrities' metaphysical attractiveness. To take it from museum and put it to its original use of packing item for household soap would be sacrilegious. Janšas changed their names and transfigured them into ready-mades, but names remained what they were: ordinary given names together with documents. Being at the same times both artworks and ordinary thing is what invests them with something extra-ordinary, but it is not of the kind needed to safeguard the uniqueness of an artwork. Therefore, what Janšas do is not dangerous for philosophical reason, as poetry for Plato. It is

dangerous for the last straw of difference between ordinary thing and the artwork needed for an artivist relationship with the world during second modernity.

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