

Postcard

Uršula Rebek, Vienna

A Subversive Question – Do You Like Your Name?

The More of Us There Are, the Faster We Will Reach Our Goal by three artists named Janez Janša set off on its path in the first part of April in Vienna; in Slovenia, this documentary performance will premiere in autumn, but it is not known what paths the three artists will take to Ljubljana. The Austrian daily *Der Standard* announced the event with the headline “There’s a Janez Janša Everywhere”; an extensive text explained the work of the three Slovenian artists with the same name, promising the audience a satire that will take them into reality. The spectators, in fact, attentively followed the video projection and the simultaneous goings on on stage; they reacted with amazement, they were astonished, satisfied, excited, one could hear giggling, while from the two or three Slovenians present a boisterous laughter occasionally boomed.

First, the three renamed artists introduced uncertainty into the auditorium regarding the general conception of a personal name and the relation to the identity of its bearer. In an environment where nicknames are rare and often mocking, people vigorously cling to their names and even the incomers like to get rid of the letters that the German alphabet does not have. One of the reasons for changing one’s name is its difficult pronunciation, for in Austria one can legally change one’s name only under certain conditions and by stating weighty reasons. It is not allowed to give an original name to a person which is why the registry office checks the origin of every name in records collected from all over the world. If a name is not registered even in Kazakhstan, for example, then it does not exist and they reject it. It is interesting how, in the context of this performance, a characteristic Slovenian name loses the character of its difficult pronunciation and how the individually pronounced “Janez” sounds a bit differently in every environment.

We could watch the film part of the performance also in the darkness of a cinema or on some kind of a screen, but, in the theatre, during the partly improvised adaptation of the filmed material, the spectator’s attention is again and again directed by performer Družen Dragojevič. The presence of the stage gives the informative a unique distance, the artists manage to establish a tension between the dynamic video images and the stage, while for the ones who are not acquainted with the situation, the role of the intermediary is perhaps crucial. In the documentarily conceived presentation, a certain historical moment and its political everyday unfolds, individual sequences are accompanied by expert definitions and interpretations of the laws and illuminated by theoretical contributions. The personal enters this framework through the three artists. In the intimate corner are their families where their loyal and unshaken mothers do not change their sons because of the changed name in their birth certificates, where fathers have more difficulty in accepting the radical change of their heirs and where the children

understandingly declare that the joke has gone far enough. JJ in the role of the father remains a father.

While various aspects regarding the naming and name changing open and the questions of an individual's identity emerge, there is present a powerlessness of a politician who is not the only representative of the brand and does not manage to defend the territory surrounding his name. The Slovenian act in force is especially broad since it allows every citizen a free choice of their name or surname. Rebirths and refreshments are thus realisable. The reason the three Janšas did this is explained by numerous random and select interviewees – from the guesses or convictions of people in the streets and the temporary or telling statements of politicians to the unease of associates.

A critical relation to the act is established by theory, which, especially with the witty reflections, comparisons and stories of philosopher Mladen Dolar, really cut deeply into reality. The zealous words of theatre theoretician Blaž Lukan raise the questions of what is to follow. The first performance achieved its purpose and will probably further develop its stage moment while advancing on its path.

Only a few steps away from the theatre in Künstlerhaus, the Vienna Philharmonic performed a symphony by Joseph Hayden and a work by Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy in a packed gilt hall of the famous Musikverein. The two events ended at the same time and the visitors met on the common platform, joined and mixed and then in a heavy spring shower rushed to the underground, taxis or continued their path on the trails of culture.