

Suzana Milevska: The Political Economy of the Name and Events of Representation in Jasmina Cibic's Art

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Jasmina Cibic's latest project *For Our Economy and Culture* is inextricably linked to the paradoxes and politics of naming, representation, and mimesis. Having been selected to officially represent Slovenia at the 55<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition of the Venice Biennale, Cibic addresses in her complex research-based project precisely the issues that are raised when any art or artist is put in the role of representing a nation or national identity. Furthermore, the project tackles the question of whether there is any "proper" selection criteria or appropriate iconography for such representation, and inevitably takes into account the inner contradictions and paradoxes of such an immanent critique of the relationship between national and international art from a contemporary critical perspective.

The artist delves into the exploration of a complex grid of previously existing traces and long forgotten discussions. She follows different arguments from various periods and phases that shaped the discourse of contemporary Slovenian art and architecture. Specifically, in order to unravel the extent of the often contradictory discussions that confront modernist and functionalist arguments with postmodernist critique and critical regionalism, or challenge national values with international ambitions, Cibic stages a scripted video discussion based on the archival interviews of the architect, Vinko Glanz, who was the chief protocol architect of post-war Yugoslavia.

### Taxonomy

In 1937, Oskar Scheibel, the Slovenian amateur entomologist and great admirer of Hitler, gave the name *Anophthalmus hitleri* to the endemic cave beetle discovered in 1933 in Slovenia. At that time, he could hardly have anticipated the complex ideological implications of the now infamous name. Cibic boldly includes a direct reference to this unique national blunder from Slovenia's nationalistic past, an era when the name Hitler had not yet become controversial. In this way, Cibic emphasizes the contradictory and paradoxical notion of the artist representing her nation. More precisely, she challenges some of the paradoxical as-

pects of identity politics such as the relationship between a proper name and national representation.

The images of hand-drawn beetles,<sup>1</sup> that are scanned, multiplied, printed, and glued in the form of wallpaper all over the Slovenian Pavilion, stress the problematic notion of exhibiting a rare “animal” that exemplifies both “genus” and nationhood. If interpreted in an extremely metaphorical way, there is no great difference between the endemic *Anophthalmus hitleri* and the artist turned national representative. The isolated national-artistic “sample” exhibited in the context of any contemporary international exhibition, and particularly at the Venice Biennale which is one of the last remnants of traditional exhibition structures based on national selection and representation, closely echoes the problematic genealogy of the international exhibits in the imperial structures of the grand exhibitions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with their elements of a “human zoo”.<sup>2</sup>

Since the end of World War Two, the beetle’s name *Anophthalmus hitleri*, similar to the almost complete extinction of the use of the first name Adolf, has become an emphatically undesirable reference.<sup>3</sup> To put it mildly, it has become more of a burden than an attractive brand. Although the use of indigenous animals as mascots has caused recent controversy as such exploitation has come to be seen as offensive and disrespectful, it nevertheless remains common for endemic animals, such as the popular Australian koala and kangaroo or China’s giant panda, to be used as iconic tokens for the “branding” of nations. Clearly, this could not be the case of *Anophthalmus hitleri*. On the contrary, it would be better to change its ideologically charged name in order to compensate for certain losses in terms of touristic and political economic gains. However, because of the strict taxonomic rules for naming and renaming, such a change is not so easy.

At the moment, two camps of scientists are engaged in a vigorous debate that threatens the very foundations of the nomenclatural edifice upon which modern taxonomy is built. One camp of scientists want to implement the PhyloCode, a new method of naming

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<sup>1</sup> The artist commissioned the drawings from professional entomologists who were asked to draw the insect according its description without ever having seen it.

<sup>2</sup> The most famous are the examples from the Paris World Fairs held in 1878 and 1889. They featured a Negro Village (*village nègre*), where indigenous people were put on display naked or half-naked in cages. During the 1889 World Fair, which was visited by twenty-eight million people, four hundred indigenous people were displayed as its major attraction.

<sup>3</sup> For example, according to the online name lexicon and Knud Bielefeld’s statistics, the use the name Adolf reached its peak during the first half of the twentieth century and almost vanished during the first five years after World War II (<http://www.beliebte-vornamen.de/4501-adolf.htm%3E>) (accessed 1 April 2013).

taxonomic groups, and the other wants to keep the existing Linnean system, which was used by Oskar Scheibel.<sup>4</sup>

Linnean classification organizes species in a hierarchical scheme based largely on similarities in their forms and other traits that usually, though not always, reflect evolutionary relationships. In contrast, the PhyloCode would name and organise living things based on common ancestry and the non-hierarchical branches of the evolutionary family tree. It would be based explicitly on phylogeny: that is, on the evolutionary history of a species or higher taxonomic group.<sup>5</sup> The main drawback of the Linnean system is precisely naming and renaming. Because groups are named with suffixes that denote their rank in the pre-established hierarchy,<sup>6</sup> reclassification of an existing species or discovery of a new one involves changes in rank and therefore requires renaming whole suites of taxonomic groups – a cascade of renaming. In fact, any renaming at all must be motivated by the discovery of new species rather than by social, cultural, or ideological issues such as those that afflict the *Anophthalmus hitleri*. The implementation of the Phylo-Code would solve this problem and make the potential renaming of different species, including those that have socially and politically “incorrect” names such as *Anophthalmus hitleri*, far easier.

The core proposition of the PhyloCode is to abandon Linnean hierarchical ranks and recognize only species and clades. (A clade is a group of all organisms that share a particular common ancestor.)<sup>7</sup> The scheme does not dispense with hierarchical organization, as clades would be nested within one another according to phylogenetic principles. The key advantage of the proposed change to the taxonomical system is that changes made in one part of a classification would not require altering other group names. However, if the PhyloCode is accepted, it could impose changes to the names of over 1.75 million species.

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<sup>4</sup> PhyloCode proponents aim to replace the nominal system developed by Carl von Linné (Carolus Linnaeus, 1707–1778), the father of modern taxonomy, which has been used by virtually all scientists since the mid-1700s. For more information check: *International Society for Phylogenetic Nomenclature*: <http://phylonames.org/>, and *PhyloCode*: <http://www.ohio.edu/phylocode/>

<sup>5</sup> Unlike the PhyloCode, Linnean taxonomy does not formally incorporate phylogeny, but its ranks (species within genus, genus within family, family within class and so on) partly imply evolutionary relationships. For more information check: *International Society for Phylogenetic Nomenclature*: <http://phylonames.org/>, and *PhyloCode*: <http://www.ohio.edu/phylocode/>

<sup>6</sup> For instance, all animal families end in -ae, as in Hominidae.

<sup>7</sup> PhyloCode defenders have not yet established the new rules for converting existing species names or for naming new species. Several methods involve retaining the binomial name (genus, species: *Homo sapiens*), but formatting it differently to distinguish from clade names: for example, human beings might become *homosapiens* in the Hominid clade. The scheme does not dispense with hierarchical organization, as clades will be nested within one another according to phylogenetic principles.

## The Gift of a Name

According to Jacques Derrida, giving names is paradoxically an act of both love and justice. In his book, *On the Name*, Derrida writes that in everyday life we give new names to people whom we love as the ultimate gift and expect nothing back in return.<sup>8</sup> In other words, we give something to our loved ones that is not ours to give away – sweetheart, darling, honey, etc – as proof of our commitment. However, the biggest paradox of naming is that the “gift of the name is to give something you do not have” and that in many cases may not even want.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Derrida clearly states that: “[...] if the name never belongs originally and rigorously to s/he who receives it, it also no longer belongs from the first moment to s/he who gives it”.<sup>10</sup>

The question to be asked, therefore, is to whom the name *Anophthalmus hitleri* belongs today? And if the name does not persist how are we to deal with its legacy? What is at stake for history and for Slovenia if the almost extinct species *Anophthalmus hitleri* survives but its problematic name is erased? Who will bear witness to the “act of love” of the scientist who named the beetle and of the historic period in which it was acceptable to celebrate the name of Hitler?

It is important to recall that philosophers have never agreed on the nature of the relationship between identity, representation, and name. For example, in the view of Gilles Deleuze, the first moment of giving/receiving a name is in itself “the highest point of depersonalization” because it is here that we acquire “the most intense discernibility in the instantaneous apprehension of the multiplicities” belonging to us.<sup>11</sup> However, most linguists and theorists agree that there is always behind a name a certain concept that assumes a contract or a social agreement. The symbolic expressed in language is the pact that links subjects together in one action. Human action is originally founded on the existence of the world of the symbol, namely on laws and contracts.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, Stanford University Press, Palo Alto, Calif., 1995, pp. 84-85.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p. 84.

<sup>11</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, tr. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1996, p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Freud’s Papers on Technique 1953–1954”, tr. John Forrester, in Jacques-Alain Miller, ed., *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book I*, Norton, New York, 1991.

## The Politics of Right and Wrong Names

*Nomen est omen.*

– Latin Proverb

*Wisdom begins with calling things by their right names*

– Chinese Proverb

Which are the right names, which are the right systems of naming and renaming, and who decides on them? Do we still believe the proverbs that leave little space for subjectivization and agency, that insist on dragging the subject into an already determined position? If we are to rename *Anophthalmus hitleri*, the most urgent question is who has the right and the power to make that decision and who has the right and power to select the new name. This is a question of hegemony and of the power of a regime of representation, both in the realm of the symbolic and in the realm of the imaginary, which actually configures the realm of real.

According to Jacques Lacan, the symbolic is made possible because of the acceptance of the Name-of-the-Father, the laws and restrictions that control both our desire and the rules of communication. However, only through recognition of the Name-of-the-Father is one able to enter into the community of others. The laws and restrictions of naming control both our desire and the rules of communication.

According to Althusser's interpretation of Lenin's insistence on the close relationship between ideology and interpellation, the main purpose of ideology is in "constituting concrete individuals as subjects".<sup>13</sup> So pervasive is ideology in its constitution of subjects that it forms our reality and thus appears to us as "true" or "evident". "What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it. That is why those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology: one of the effects of ideology is the practical *denegation* of the ideological character of ideology by ideology: ideology never says, "I am ideological.""<sup>14</sup>

I would make the argument that every act of naming is an act of renaming because one of the strongest socio-symbolical contracts is the name: both giving names and changing names. Therefore, any attempt to change a name is actually a paradox, an attempt to break with the social contract that was originally imposed on the subject but at the same time can

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<sup>13</sup> Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1972, p. 174.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, p. 118.

never be completely prevented or avoided because it always implies new social intricate mazes.

According to Jacques Rancière, the most urgent political issues, those of subjectivization and emancipation, lie behind the policy of “proper” names. For Rancière, the question of naming is clearly a heterological question.<sup>15</sup>

First, it is never the simple assertion of an identity; it is always, at the same time, the denial of an identity given by an other, given by the ruling order of policy. Policy is about “right” names, names that pin people down to their place and work. Politics is about “wrong” names-misnomers that articulate a gap and connect with a wrong.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, Rancière asserts that the second aspect of the heterological nature of emancipation is a demonstration:

[...] a demonstration always supposes an other, even if that other refuses evidence or argument. [...] There is no consensus, no undamaged communication, no settlement of a wrong. But there is a polemical commonplace for the handling of a wrong and the demonstration of equality.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, the logic of subjectivization always entails an impossible political identification and that is exactly the paradox of any national representation via artistic exemplification. According to Rancière, twenty years ago we were in the heterological logic of “wrong” names in the political culture of conflict, and now we have only “right” names, or to continue Rancière’s argument: “the place of a political subject is an interval or a gap: being together to the extent that we are in between – between names, identities, cultures, and so on.”<sup>18</sup> This uncomfortable position gives way to the metapolitical discourse that interprets the heterology of emancipation of the name as illusion, as a sign of untruth.

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<sup>15</sup> Jacques Rancière, “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization”, *October*, vol. 61 (summer 1992): pp. 58-64.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63

<sup>18</sup> “We are Europeans and xenophobes because the ‘immigrant’ had an *other* name that has been lost; they were workers or proletarians. In the meantime, this name has been lost as a *political* name. They retained their ‘own’ name, and an other that has no *other* name becomes the object of fear and rejection. The ‘new’ racism is the hatred of the other that comes forth when the political procedures of social polemics collapse.” – “Politics, Identification and Subjectivization”, p. 63.

The distinction made by Rancière can be taken even further and understood as a distinction between the logic of subjectivization (art/artist) and the logic of identification (national representation). This distinction creates the inner tension that provides the perspective from which Cibic's project speaks to us, openly and with incredible rigour and precision about national pride and shame, about identity and subjectivity, about nationhood and economy, culture and art.

The political economy of her project emerges as a sign of potential contestation of the exploitation of the artist as a national token, as well as of the positive aspect of representation as an act of communication, which, like any scene of representation, is fundamentally social and interpersonal.

The act of representation is always dialogical since it implies the presence of another or others. In contrast, the emergence of the sign/name is always a temporary deferral of certain violence because of the potential act of an initiative for its change. Somewhere between the act of representation and naming politics, the political economy of the name takes place. This is the potential space that Jasmina Cibic occupies with her complex project *For Our Economy and Culture*.

Suzana Milevska