

AKSIOMA
Institute for Contemporary
Art Ljubljana

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Ljubljana, 18 September 2017

PRESS RELEASE

Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana, presents:

Proper and Improper Names ***Identity in the Information Society***

CONFERENCE

Curated by: Marco Deseriis

Kino Šiška, Ljubljana

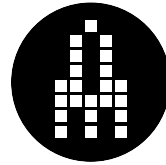
Trg prekomorskih brigad 3, Ljubljana

17 – 18 October 2017

aksioma.org/im-propernames

Registration:

Please send your full name and e-mail address by October 16th to: aksioma.project.space@gmail.com



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What aesthetic and political strategies may counter the quest for collecting data and measuring and predicting human behaviour, characteristic of informational capitalism? This conference addresses this question by bringing together theorists, artists, writers, and performers who have forged concepts, aesthetic codes, and authoring strategies that tend to escape measurement and attribution. Continuing Aksioma's long-running investigation into the problems of identity and authorship in the age of networks, *Proper and Improper Names* explores modes of intervention that cannot be reduced to individual or collective identities. Rather, in shuttling between the I and the We, as well as the multiple dimensions of the self, these experiments exceed state and market attempts at measuring and producing the subject as a stable political, biological, and epistemological unit.

The guests of the conference are **Marco Deseriis** (IT), whose book *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous* provides the conceptual framework for the event; **Gerald Raunig** (AT), a philosopher who has recently published *Dividuum*, a book exploring the genealogy of the term "dividual," i.e. that which is divisible and combinable according to the principle of similarity; **Kristin Sue Lucas** (USA), a performance artist who has managed to "refresh" her birth name through a legal procedure in court; **Natalie Bookchin** (USA), a media artist whose work explores collective identity as performed on social network sites through video installations and online works of art; and the collective **Wu Ming** (IT), who have created a layered body of literary works, critical texts, screenplays and maps, collaborating under a pseudonymous identity. The first day will end with a screening of *I-Be Area* (2007), an experimental film by U.S. artist **Ryan Trecartin**, in which characters and voices are different manifestations of the same person, showing the fragmentation of identity in the digital age. Finally, the conference will come to a close with the opening of **Janez Janša®**, the anthological exhibition by Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša at MSUM – Museum of Contemporary Art Metelkova, curated by Domenico Quaranta.

PROGRAMME

TUE 17 October 2017

17:00–17:45 Marco Deseriis: *Improper Names, Con-Dividual Subjectivities*

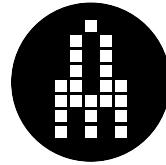
17:45–18:10 Kristin Sue Lucas: *Refresh*, performance

18:10–18:30 Coffee break

18:30–19:15 Gerald Raunig: *Every Beginning Is Dividual*

19:15–20:00 Marco Deseriis & Gerald Raunig in conversation

20:30 Ryan Trecartin: *I-Be Area* (2007), movie screening



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WED 18 October 2017

17:00–18:00 Wu Ming: *Collaborative Authorship and Condividuality in the Wu Ming Foundation*

18:00–18:15 Coffee break

18:15–19:15 Natalie Bookchin: *Prospective Collectives: Animating the Shared Self*

20:00 Janez Janša®, exhibition opening at **MSUM** (Maistrova 3, Ljubljana). Curated by Domenico Quaranta

Marco Deseriis: *Improper Names, Con-Dividual Subjectivities*

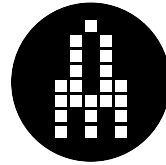
The conference is inspired by Marco Deseriis' book *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous*. Deseriis will introduce the conference by offering a genealogy of the "improper name," which he defines as the adoption of the same pseudonym by organized collectives, affinity groups, and individual authors. Examples of collective pseudonyms include Ned Ludd, the fictional leader of the English Luddites; Alan Smithee, a shared signature used by Hollywood film directors to disown movies that have been re-cut against their will; Luther Blissett, a fictional media prankster, collective author, and anti-copyright activist; and the hacktivist group Anonymous. Deseriis's central argument is that an improper name is a form of symbolic power that destabilizes the boundaries between the We and the I as the original creators of the alias lose control of its intended function to unforeseen uses. To express this tension between practices that are neither collective nor individual, Deseriis uses the notion of "condividuality", a form of association that does not presuppose a community or a common intentionality, but only a concatenation of parts.

Gerald Raunig: *Every Beginning Is Dividual*

The concept of condividuality is also central to the recent work of Austrian philosopher Gerald Raunig, author of *Dividuum. Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution* (2016). According to Raunig, a "dividual" is a singularity that is divisible and governed by the principle of similarity. As compared to the individual, which is governed by the principle of dissimilarity and distinction, a dividual can be easily combined with other dividuals that share some properties with it. Raunig argues that the "condividual assemblages" that emerge from the concatenation of multiple dividuals can be found everywhere in the online world, from the large data sets known as Big Data to financial transactions to networks of infected computers that share their processing power unbeknownst to their users. A conversation between Deseriis and Raunig will introduce a debate on how the notions of the improper and the condividual can help us rethink identity and collective action at a time in which many forms of association are automated, involuntary, and governed by algorithms.

Kristin Sue Lucas: *Refresh, performance*

A New York-based artist, Lucas became the most current version of herself in October 2007, when she succeeded in legally changing her name from Kristin Sue Lucas to Kristin Sue Lucas in a Superior



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Court of California courtroom. On the name change petition that she submitted, she wrote “Refresh” as the reason for the change, to evoke the refreshing of a web page.

Since then, the artist has created the Refresh Archive (2013 – ongoing), a collection of newspaper clippings, courtroom drawings, official documents, performance documentation, and portraits of the artist before and after the refresh, and used the transcript of the courtroom sessions to develop an ongoing series of performances, the *Refresh Cold Reads* (2007 – ongoing), where guest readers are cast into the roles of Kristin and the Judge based on their personal backgrounds. In Ljubljana, the re-enactment will be exceptionally done by Kristin Sue Lucas in the role of Kristin Sue Lucas and by actor Dražen Dragojević in the role of the Judge. Dražen Dragojević has been, among other things, the main character and the narrative voice in the documentary film *My Name is Janez Janša* (2012).

Wu Ming: *Collaborative Authorship and Condividuality in the Wu Ming Foundation*

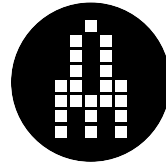
Wu Ming 1, a member of the Italian “band of novelists” Wu Ming, will explore the question of authorship from an unconventional angle. Wu Ming is the main offshoot of Luther Blissett—a collective pseudonym used by dozens of artists and activists in the 1990s—and a literary workshop that experiments with hybrid narrative genres such as the historic novel and non-fiction written with literary techniques. Wu Ming (“No Name” in Mandarin) has developed a model of authorship that is both collective and individual, as it is linked to collectively authored novels as well as works authored under five individual pseudonyms (Wu Ming 1, Wu Ming 2, and so forth). Rather than seeing individual and collective authorship as alternative to one another, Wu Ming 1 will explain how in-group and networked collaborations with other authors, friends, and readers across multiple media channels have allowed them to develop a condividual and transmedia mode of storytelling.

Natalie Bookchin: *Prospective Collectives: Animating the Shared Self*

Natalie Bookchin’s presentation will explore the notion of condividuality through an aesthetic analysis of the current status of the networked image. In recent years, Bookchin’s work has focused on the creation of online and offline video installations that combine hundreds of YouTube video clips in which ordinary people present themselves before an audience. From teenage girls who dance alone in their rooms to minority groups who reflect upon racial segregation and poverty, these individuals are simultaneously isolated from each other and connected to each other. Yet it is only when Bookchin aligns these personal video diaries in a matrix that emphasizes the recurrence of bodily and linguistic expressions that their connectedness comes to the fore. In this respect, Bookchin’s presentation will allow participants to discuss condividuality as a form of connection and concatenation that proceeds from individual to individual without necessarily passing through a shared narrative or communitarian mythology.

Ryan Trecartin: *I-Be Area* (2007), movie screening

All the characters in the movie are live manifestations of the different online personas of one single individual, offering a sharp visualization of the impact of social networking on individual and collective identity. As the artist explains it, “the basic idea of the film is that what identifies people is



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not necessarily their bodies anymore; it's all the relationships they maintain with others. You are your area, rather than you are yourself. If someone describes you, that description becomes a part of your area, whether you like it or not."

Janez Janša, Janez Janša, Janez Janša: *Janez Janša®*, exhibition opening

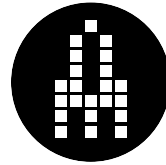
What's in a name? How does it relate to ownership, legal status, self perception and self representation, profiling, surveillance and commodification of language and related topics that define the contemporary condition? What's an artwork and what are the boundaries that define it in relation to life, institutions and companies? These are just a few of the topics explored by Janez Janša, Janez Janša and Janez Janša in their work since their name change in 2007. The exhibition *Janez Janša®* offers an overview of this story which, although strongly rooted in Slovenia and its recent history, raises some universal questions about identity in the age of biopolitics and about art in the age of information.

BIOGRAPHIES

Marco Deseriis is Marie Curie Fellow at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Florence, and Assistant Professor in Media and Screen Studies at Northeastern University in Boston. He is the author of *Improper Names: Collective Pseudonyms from the Luddites to Anonymous* (2015), a book that examines the contentious politics and the struggles for control of a shared alias from the early nineteenth century to the age of networks. Funded by a research grant of the European Commission, his current research project examines the rise of Internet-based forms of participatory democracy in Europe. In 2008, Deseriis co-authored *Net.Art: L'arte della Connessione*, the first Italian book about Internet art. His writings can be accessed at <https://neu.academia.edu/MarcoDeseriis>.

Gerald Raunig is a philosopher and art theorist. He works at the Zürich University of the Arts, and the European Institute for Progressive Cultural Policies (eipcp), Vienna. He is a co-editor of the multilingual publishing platform Transversal Texts and the Austrian journal Kamion. He is the author of *Dividuum: Machinic Capitalism and Molecular Revolution, Vol. 1.*, (2016), *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity* (2014), *A Thousand Machines: A Concise Philosophy of the Machine as Social Movement* (2010) and *Art and Revolution: Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (2009), all published by Semiotext(e)/MIT Press. He has also co-edited *Critique of Creativity* (2011) and *Art and Contemporary Critical Practice* (2009), both published by mayflybooks. His books have been translated into Serbian, Spanish, Slovenian, Russian, Italian, Dutch and Turkish. Many of his writings can be accessed at <http://transversal.at>.

Wu Ming is the pseudonym of a group of Italian authors, launched in 2000 from an offshoot of the Luther Blissett project. Unlike the multiple-use name Luther Blissett, Wu Ming stands for a defined but variable group of authors (ranging from three to five, depending on the period), active in various fields of literature and cultural activism. Since 2000, the members of Wu Ming have authored several best-selling novels, such as *Q* (signed as Luther Blissett), *54*, *Manituana*, *Altai*, and *The Army of*



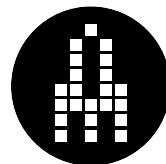
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Sleepwalkers, which have been translated into several languages. The most recent work of Wu Ming 1, *No Promise This Trip Will Be Short*, is an extensive investigation of the No Tav anti-high speed rail movement in Val di Susa, Italy. Wu Ming's writings can be accessed at <http://wumingfoundation.tumblr.com>.

Natalie Bookchin is an artist based in Brooklyn, New York, and a Professor of Media and Associate Chair of the Visual Arts Department at the Rutgers Mason Gross School of the Arts. Her work is exhibited widely, including at MoMA, LACMA, PS1, Mass MOCA, the Walker Art Center, the Pompidou Centre, MOCA Los Angeles, the Whitney Museum, the Tate, and Creative Time. She has received numerous grants and awards, including from Creative Capital, the California Arts Council, the Guggenheim Foundation, the Durfee Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the Daniel Langlois Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation. Her most recent work *Now he's out in public and everyone can see* premiered at Cinema du Reel at the Pompidou in Paris in March 2017. Her previous work, *Long Story Short*, premiered at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and won the Grand Prize at Cinema du Reel in Paris in 2016. <http://bookchin.net>

Kristin Lucas is an artist working in the realms of digital art, video, performance, intervention, sculpture, and installation. Her work has been exhibited in the 1997 Whitney Biennial, New York, and in group exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, Artists Space, San Jose Museum of Art, ZKM and at festivals in Amsterdam, Berlin, Mexico City, Montreal, Toronto, New York and San Francisco. She has had solo exhibitions at the Postmasters Gallery, the Or Gallery, JEMA, Windows, the O.K Center for Contemporary Art, the Foundation for Art and Creative Technologies, [Plug in] Basel, and the Institute for Contemporary Art Philadelphia. She is the recipient of several awards, including the Colbert Foundation Award for Media Arts, the Rema Hort Mann Foundation Grant for Video and Performance, and the Urban Visionaries Award for Emerging Talent. Her single channel videos are distributed by Electronic Arts Intermix, New York. Lucas lives in Oakland and New York. <http://www.kristinlucas.com>

Ryan Trecartin was born in 1981 in Webster, Texas, and raised in rural Ohio, where he designed costumes and sets for theatre productions in high school. He is known for videos such as *A Family Finds Entertainment* (2004), *I-Be Area* (2007), and *Sibling Topics (Section A)* (2009), and has been collaborating with artist Lizzie Firtch since 2000. Trecartin has received numerous awards and his work has been exhibited at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, the New Museum, the Institute of Contemporary Arts Philadelphia, ZKM, the Whitney Biennial and several other venues. Some of Trecartin's films and videos can be accessed at <http://www.ubu.com/film/trecartin.html>.



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Credits

Production: Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana, 2017

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Artistic Director: Janez Janša

Producer: Marcela Okretič

Executive Producer: Sonja Grdina

Public Relations: Alja Žorž



The conference is realised in the framework of [State Machines](#), a joint project by [Aksioma](#) (SI), [Drugo more](#) (HR), [Furtherfield](#) (UK), [the Institute of Network Cultures](#) (NL) and [NeMe](#) (CY).

STATE MACHINES

Supported by: the Creative Europe programme of the European Union, the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Slovenia, the Municipality of Ljubljana and Istituto Italiano di Cultura in Slovenia.



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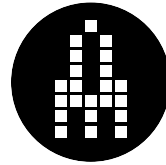


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Notes to the Editor

Photos available for free download: <http://www.aksioma.org/press/im-propernames.zip>

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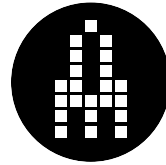
Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Art, Ljubljana (2002), is a non-profit cultural organisation with the status of “public interest in the field of culture”. With the regular support of local public and private funding, it produces, presents and disseminates projects in the fields of new media and visual and performing arts. Aksioma explores social, political, ethical, and aesthetic concerns, critically discussing and investigating the structures of modern society in the Web 2.0 age.

From 2014 to 2016 it was the project leader for [*Masters&Servers - Networked Cultures In The Post-Digital Age*](#), a 24-month project co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union and since May 2017 it has led the new european project [*State Machines - Art, Work, and Identity in an Age of Planetary-Scale Computation*](#).

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State Machines - Art, Work, and Identity in an Age of Planetary-Scale Computation (2017-19) is a collaborative project that investigates the new relationships between states, citizens, and the stateless made possible by emerging technologies. Focussing on how such technologies impact identity and citizenship, digital labour, and finance, the project joins five experienced partners from Slovenia (Aksioma), the Netherlands ([the Institute of Network Cultures](#)), the UK ([Furtherfield](#)), Cyprus ([NeMe](#)), and Croatia ([Drugo more](#)) together with a range of artists, curators, theorists, and audiences. Workshops on blockchain technology, research into new cognitive models and forms of citizenship, and conferences on democratic participation and networked cultural production will be organised alongside art exhibitions, new commissions, and publications, with the aim of building new kinds of literacy for digital understanding and participation. *State Machines* insists on the need for new forms of expression and new artistic practices to address the most urgent questions of our time, and seeks to educate and empower the digital subjects of today to become active, engaged, and effective digital citizens of tomorrow.

The project is co-funded by the Creative Europe Programme of the European Union.



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