

Thomas Raab

Counter- IDENTITY'

I first saw Clever Gretel in June 1999 in Vienna, in the 'Emballagenfabrik' (printing machine factory) near the tube station Handelskai. Although I have always rather disliked performance art because of its often celebrated claim of being authentic and its rather serious histrionics, I realized after several minutes that Clever Gretel was working with just these objections. As it always happens with clever people, she quickly fascinated me.

Clever Gretel sees itself as an experiment, which examines its changes within the parameter of time. By employing alternating components, such as people, technical media, and equipment, as well as different performance sites, the project reveals how identity inevitably re-constructs itself every second: As the viewers' construction and the participants', looking at themselves. Obviously these constructions are constituted by time, place, and the public created.

On something stage-like, three characters seemingly autonomously develop an experimental analysis of movement, and establish a relation between their actions, the objects and screens used, and the other actors. Objects and text passages were collected by the group and were then processed further during rehearsals.

Despite my attempt to see the individual actors as independent entities, which would correspond to the subject-centred structures of performance art and theatre, I quickly realized that the entire picture of the experiment was being forced on me. Taken by themselves, the technical and personal processes didn't make any sense, a fact which forces attentive onlookers to immediately create meaning on their own. If I see Clever Gretel as a metaphor for the dynamics of the psyche or functional patterns of the brain, it becomes obvious that, assuming a cognitive scientific stance (a perspective that Stefanie Seibold, who conceptualized the project, likes to see as a sub-text), an identity-establishing story, a unique sense, inevitably starts to develop, in spite of incompatible, individual functions of the psyche. At the same time the corporate identity 'Clever Gretel' demonstrates the economic necessity and the lack of functionality of the bourgeois understanding of the term 'subject', of our beautiful and metaphysical basic assumption.