

IdEntity

Andreas Feddersen | Deniss Kacs | Mareike Maage | Gabriele Rabe | Markus Wendling



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SAVVY CONTEMPORARY | RICHARDSTRASSE 43/44 | BERLIN - NEUKÖLLN

[www.savvy - contemporary.com](http://www.savvy-contemporary.com)

VERNISSAGE 05.11.10 + 8.00 PM

EXHIBITION 06.11.10 - 28.11.10

OPENING HOURS THURSDAY - SUNDAY 4 - 8 PM

On a personal note or Articulating the promiscuity of the “self”

At my, I would say, tender age of 33 I have been fortunate or maybe rather unfortunate enough to endure a multitude of ‘selves’, which one with a sound portion of fantasy could term identities. But the irony about it all is the fact that until the age of 18, i.e. until I officially took the first step into manhood, I could associate nothing else to the word ‘identity’ than the piece of paper I was always obliged to carry along with me, termed an identity card.

In the 1996 publication *Être singulier pluriel*¹, where Jean-Luc Nancy theorizes on plurality and singularity of identity, clearly positions the “we” before the “I” and postulates the idea that the individual is always understood within his/her social framework. If this holds true then identity has been highly promiscuous, given the different societies I have had to find myself in, in these first three decades of my existence on planet earth.

To braid on the conception and expression of individuality or affiliations to communities i.e. the idea of identity, it will be necessary to draw attention (without getting into the crux of social psychology) to personal identity related to self-image, self-esteem, self-awareness and personality, and to social identity related to aspects and the ability of individuals to connect with and be part of social structures that share the same values, attitudes, religion, tradition, skin or eye colours. I will like to channel this article in the direction of social identity without neglecting the personal.

¹ Nancy, Jean-Luc, 1996: *Être singulier pluriel*. Paris: Galilée

But truly I still am as blank as always when it comes to the question of identity. Once upon a time I was a boy, then became a man; once upon a time a Cameroonian, then German, then none of the above; once upon a time a student, salesman, builder, then scientist, engineer, artist and curator. But of most interest is the identity that my society has laid upon me i.e. that of the foreigner. So what do all these roles I have played in life have to say about my identity? If identity is that element by which a group of people find a common denominator or distinguish themselves from others with help of geographical frontiers, names, languages or cultural interest, then the promiscuity of my identity knows no limits. Understandably, because I do feel attached to a multitude of geographical regions; have four names that could each originate from Asia, Africa, Europe or the Americas; feel at home with half a dozen languages and my cultural interest is limited only by the four walls of the globe.

So, even more questions arise on this ominous issue of identity: how can I articulate my identity? How much influence does my society, i.e. the plural, have on me, i.e. the singular, and how much influence do I have on my society? Does it suffice to identify oneself to a particular identity in order to obtain that identity? What if I decided to obtain a Norwegian or say a female identity... what roles do my ego, the id and the entity play in this choice and process?

So, how can I articulate my identity? As it seems, I haven't gone any further in understanding this phenomenon and my only reference still seems to be this piece of paper I am still obliged to carry along with me still called my identity card.

In a period when the French nation has been debating, for a while, about national and genetic identity, when Germany is suffocating in an integration and migration debate, when Italy, Holland, Sweden or Denmark and not to mention the countries of the former East-block are almost competing as to which country can attain the furthest political right position, one has no option but to be confronted (on a daily basis) with the issue of identity.

The fun about it all is that even this piece of paper called the identity card is not even a guarantee for any form of identity. I remember a few occasions where my ID card just had as much value as a piece of toilet paper. For example, once on a road trip from Berlin to Istanbul, when all passengers of a 70-seater coach had to wait an additional hour (after having covered circa 11 hours by bus from Budapest heading towards Sophia) just because the border police couldn't or didn't want to reconcile the picture on my ID card with his imagination of a German nationality, i.e. questioning my national identity. Or, the numerous times in Germany when I have been asked of my citizenship and when ever I answer German (because indeed the German law is against a dual nationality², except in extra ordinary cases), I hear a sigh almost as deep as a lamentation cry, and then follows the question: "what is your real identity?" Which I generally answer: "Ah, you mean my real identity? My real identity is Cameroonian and my virtual one is German!"

So, how can I articulate my identity? To how many percent is identity real and to how many percent is it virtual?

What is appealing is that in this 2010th year after the death of Christ, I seem not to be the only one interested or forced to be interested in this question of identity. Although identity has always played a role in art, one has the impression that this question gains more presence these days. In its first season art21³ addressed the idea of identity in contemporary art featuring William Wegman, Bruce Nauman, Kerry James Marshall, Maya Lin, and Louise Bourgeois. Also, we are aware of outstanding positions by artists like Christian Boltanski, Kerry walker, Kader Attia who brilliantly reveal and question stereotypes and play with the concept of identity in their works.

² § 12 Staatsangehörigkeitgesetz

³ Art in the Twenty-First Century documentary, PBS

In November 2010, 5 artists and research associates from the Bauhaus University Weimar are taking upon themselves the challenge to treat this sensible issue of identity in the multi-media exhibition entitled IdEntität (IdEntity) in SAVVY Contemporary. The visual play with the letters not only helps to reduce the tension but without trivializing in this notion but diverges the attention to two very important subjects: the Id (the part of the mind in which innate instinctive impulses and primary processes are manifested) and the entity (a thing with distinct and independent existence). Ranging from Andreas Feddersen's happening "orbituary" through Gabriele Rabe's video piece "Who is Gabi Rabe?" or Markus Wendling's video "Straßburger" to Mareike Maage's picture slides "Pendant" this exhibition strives at shedding light on a multifaceted and sometimes non-linear notion of identity.

As previously mentioned, at 18 I didn't understand what identity was, at 33 I seem to understand even less. As the saying goes, tomorrow is fuller than a thousand yesterdays... I am thus looking forward to how much I understand about identity after IdEntität.

Dr. Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung
Art director and founder
SAVVY Contemporary

What is the ego?

This age-old question has provoked a variety of answers.

„*Cogito ergo sum*“ (I think, therefore I am) said Descartes, but this kind of self-assurance is very deceptive in view of current findings in brain research. La Mettrie, at the time of the French Enlightenment, was talking about the „*Homme Machine*“ (machine man) and saw nothing but fiction in our soul and spirit. Kant advocated in his philosophy of identity, the self-construction, supplemented by self-reflection, and self-cleavage. Jean-Paul Sartre saw even a permanent reflexive self-duplication „*C'est bien moi ce redoublement continuel et réflexif*“ (It's me that continual and reflective reduplication).

We can see the array of subjectivity is extraordinarily complex. As subjects we are closest to ourselves, but we first have to accept uncertainty and the provisional. So we constantly hang at poise. Self-assurance and self-doubt always go together. We are therefore in constant conflict with ourselves and often insecure.

Personal identity is not a property in the sense of permanent ownership or expertise that one has or can acquire. It might be understood as an instantaneous state, which is however subjected to constant change.

In the interplay between social identity and identity as self-awareness, thus the outside and the inside, we see the production and presentation of identity as a highly dynamic process.

The results of brain biology and genetic engineering, as well as the virtuality of many events of daily life have contributed to the disappearance of the unity of the individual. Current art production is a good indicator for this state. Not only is the disappearance of unity often being addressed, but also the exemption from hypertrophic ego and its legacy. Weightless bodies and angelic fashion are in vogue and witness the desire of not being recognized, the desire of being in-between and not being fixed. The internet offers us a complete dissolution of our identity, all body barriers can be overcome, identities can be easily replaced or newly invented, be multiplied or enhanced.

For many of us, the search for an identity is a life-mission. No longer certain about where our ego is centered, we resolve in making multiples or splits of ourselves. We often expose ourselves on our websites or social networks in a variety of functions. We gloss over our insecurity by dazzling multimedia presentations of ourselves, we define ourselves through the daily process of elimination of oncoming stimuli in the social networks: I like, I do not like, I'm a fan of, I add as friend or I delete from friends.

One thing is for sure: the question on identity does not have answers. It is a question that has to be asked over and over again in different directions.

Andreas Feddersen

Curator

Experimental Radio at Bauhaus University Weimar

Works



Obituary

Happening by Andreas Feddersen

„I'm a loser baby, so why don't you kill me?“ With this song Beck gave a generation an anthem and thereby hitting exactly on the point of our inherent self-doubts and uncertainty. We cannot say today what will become of us tomorrow. This freedom is often a pain, especially the question: Will they talk about me even after my death or will I disappear in the mass grave of marginal identities? The work „obituary“ drives this „collective drama“ on the top and anticipates a posthumous state of 15-minutes-fame.

We are under constant pressure with regard to the unique individuality we'd like to have. Unique are those who manage to actualize themselves, but how to do that is up to oneself.

„In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes.“ Andy Warhol's prophecy has come true in our society. Today you get 15 minutes of fame with an exclusive story in the BUNTE as a witness in the Kachelmann judicial process. But just as bored of the transience of fame was Andy Warhol from the constant demands on his always cited statement, so he varied it in: „In the future 15 people will be famous“. Thus, the eternal panting for fame and glory is in question to which he exercised until the dissolution of his own identity as a human being under constant transformations of his clothes, fashion accessories and hairstyles, and various roles as a commercial artist, (Pop) artist, writer, journalist, television host, film director and actor. „Who today knows where he/she will live or work tomorrow, whom he/she will love tomorrow, or what he/she will buy or eat tomorrow? Only those who make a virtue out of their disorientation will keep track of the blurred patterns and inherited guidelines in this world.“ wrote Christoph Clermont and Johannes Goebel at the end of the 90s and proclaimed in their same-titled book “The virtue of disorientation“.





Great confusion reigns. There is no one left to tell us how we should live our lives. Instead, countless parallel existing ways of life without moral deregulatory instance. What still applies today will be questioned tomorrow. The nice financial advisor is today the bad banker. The once ridiculed granivore is now the hip Bio-supermarket customer.

So, what is it all about in this circle of life that comes out of nowhere, takes form, defining itself and at the end loses its shape?

In a constant awareness of our finitude, we are masters of repression in light of the absolute certainty of death. We put so much effort to gain recognition in this society, polish our résumés on superlative high gloss and reinvent ourselves- subordinate both to personal needs and economic constraints- again and again. “Enduring Freedom” is the motto. The master plan for life doesn’t exist any more - invent yourself every day anew in the fast lane.

But the beauty, dynamics and speed by which we live our lives do not match with the assumed ugliness and the halt, which death is often associated with. People often die in hospitals completely unnoticed, graves are rarely maintained and visited, the sight of the dead has largely disappeared from public life. Death needs to be replaced so that we can just go on swinging in our everyday lives. We believe that we only „overcome“ the finiteness of life by accomplishing things in life that cause other people to talk about us posthumously. Will I be famous? If so, what for? Will future generations remember me? These questions will be asked on the evening of the vernissage by personal obituary editors who will then make an obituary photo of each volunteer, who is then aged via a special software on the aging time of his request. In a formal ceremony it will be finally presented by an obituary speaker.

Just as we constantly rewrite our own life and we re-orient ourselves ever and ever again, the visitor can take a look into his own future via „obituary“ and thus confront himself with the *”greatest mystery and scandal of human life - death“* (Giuseppe Verdi).

The debate on the issue of obituary inevitably leads to the question of what is really important to us. Maybe we are just in search of something that goes beyond the mangle of realignments.



Andreas Feddersen

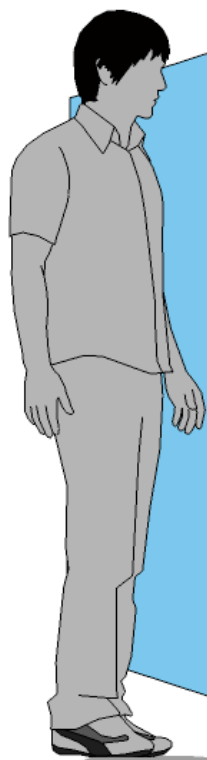
was born 1975 in Stade. He studied Musicology primarily at the
Chair for Popular Music History & Theory as well as
Roman Studies at Humboldt University in Berlin

2000 – 2005 Media Art and Design at Bauhaus University Weimar

2007 - 2008 spokesman for the Mayor and the city of Jena

He is currently artistic assistant to the chair for Experimental Radio at the Faculty of Media,
Bauhaus University Weimar and also works as producer of radio dramas in planetaria

SOUVENIR



SOUVENIR

Souvenir

Interactive video installation by Deniss Kacs

In Weimar, the ever self-preserving city, it is hardly possible to overlook Goethe or Schiller. Not only does every tourist experience this fact, but Deniss Kacs as well. He even made this matter of fact to the starting point of his work. Being Russian, he first had to learn the German language when he came to Germany. Often he had to decode it when talking to people or while he was reading Goethe poems at school. Now he is turning the tables and is far from handling the icons of German classicism with care. His selection of Goethe poems is being recited by foreigners who don't speak German fluently. At some parts only single words can be understood. However he chose them as video tutors, whose words are repeated by the visitors in a small photo booth, and recorded via webcam as well as a microphone. *Souvenir* is the title of his work since every visitor of this photo booth can send the recorded souvenir-video via mail to friends or to beloved ones around the world. The German visitor is now requested to decipher his native language.

REC



REC



REC



Since it is almost impossible to reproduce the original text, a new text is created. The visitor inevitably gets into a creative process and becomes the creator of a new poem that arises, freely associated, however in phonetic relation to the original text. Though the original poem is written again by today's perception, it dares the time jump from Weimar classicism into the here and now. A hallucinatory declarative layer arises that imposes on the original verses and counteracts them in the same time.



Deniss Kacs

born 1983 in Riga, Latvia. After finishing school and 4 semesters of applied cosmonautics in Moscow, he moved to Germany. In 2004 he began his studies of media art & design at Bauhaus University Weimar, focusing on script-writing, film direction and direction of radio dramas.

2006-2007 Academic Year at the Belgian art school Sint-Lukas in Brussels.

2008 Bachelor degree. 2010 Master degree at the Bauhaus University in Weimar with the short film „Dear Mr. Starr“



Pendant

a story made of 21 slides by Mareike Maage

Picture 1

On a beautiful morning in autumn, I was on my way through town accompanied by my boyfriend and his parents. It was the first time he visited me after we had become a couple and the first time that I met his parents. We walked around the market, looking at brushes and pots, and a machine that was burning pictures of horses and bunnies in bright wooden slats. I guess they liked me because I was also able to participate in a conversation about machines, which are necessary to do farming, especially tractors. They invited us to a cup of hot chocolate. It was exactly the kind of chocolate I like, warm, deep brown and thick.

食事の残えがら
すてにかたして
つかのひとが
つかえるように
調理台には食器
を置いたままに
しないでください
学生課



食事を終えたら
すてにかたして
つかのひとが
つかえるように
調理台には食器
を置いたままに
しないでください
学生課



Picture 2

The next time he came to visit me I introduced him to my parents. We went by car. It took us a long time. We were tired, when we finally arrived. Before he took off from his home I reminded him that it would be nice, if he could bring some gifts for my parents. He brought liverwurst that contained a lot of garlic. It was still in the fridge, when I visited home again. My parents took us to an Italian restaurant. They talked with my boyfriend. I thought about all the other boyfriends that I had brought here. When night came they put us in the flat where my grandmother died two months ago. The next day we drove to see another grandmother of mine that is still alive. We had a cup of tea and when my boyfriend went to the bathroom she came and whispered: „Nice Man that you have there! This is the one you will stay with. Forever!“



Picture 3

After my boyfriend went back home, which was far away from where I lived, I kissed a woman. It happened in a party in the countryside. Only a few people came. I was bored until the woman came and asked me to kiss her. She had a boyfriend. I was too shy to kiss her in front of him, so she brought me to bed and we kissed until we heard her boyfriend in the stairway calling her name. I woke up in a cold, big room, next to a girl and she too was very beautiful. The girl was shivering. I got up and looked for some blankets to cover her.



Picture 4

After that I had a fight with my boyfriend on the phone. I read a poem that I wrote for him. I sat on the phone for a long time listening to his breath and waiting for him to answer, but he did not say a word.



Mareike Maage

born 1979 in Hannover

1999-2007 Fine Art at the Bauhaus University in Weimar
and Tokyo National University of Fine Arts & Music in Tokyo, Inter Media Department
since 2007 assistant to the chair for Experimental Radio at the Faculty of Media,
Bauhaus University Weimar and freelance author for different German radiostations



Who is Gabi Rabe?

Video by Gabriele Rabe

„Gabriele Rabe had an easy job“. That's what one could think when taking a superficial view on the production circumstances of her work „*Who is Gabi Rabe?*“ since she didn't shoot her own movie, she only created the framework for the production. However, she provoked an unusual encounter between her past and present since several people reflect on her: Her mother, her younger brother, her boyfriend, her former soccer coach, a lifelong friend, a German exchange student whom she has met in Canada when she went on exchange herself and whom she has not seen since, a boy who wrote her the first love letter and finally two friends of her studies.

Who am I? – Where do I come from? – What is my past and how will my past connect with my future? – What inner conflicts do I struggle with?

These questions have a very central theme for her work.

“My essential motivation is to let different worlds of my life clash together. Different life phases are represented by different people who I have encountered,” says Gabriele Rabe.







Michel Montaigne (1533-1592) once wrote „*We are double in ourselves. Me today and me once, these are two different people. We are all out of pure patches and shreds, and so multi-colored pieced together that each lobe plays its own game in every moment of our life. And there is as much difference between us and ourselves as between ourselves and the others. Our self invents itself as a permanent invention.*“

This permanent invention is even more important due to the globalized world we live in today. It has become very unusual to live in one place for a long time. Typically, we change our living circumstances with each new phase in life (study-wise, job-wise). How far does a person change with it? How visible is such a change? Who do we encounter on our path?

The artist delegates the answer about who she really is to the recipient.

Every question about her has several different answers.

An interesting exploration of intimate parts of her personality begins and reveals who often we (have to) reinvent ourselves in our lives.



Gabriele Rabe

born in 1985 in Leinefelde / Eichsfeld, Germany

2005-2009: Media Art & Design at Bauhaus University Weimar

Preferences during the Bachelor's degree: radio & film

Since March 2010: Master in Development, Innovation and Change (Mdic) at the University of Bologna, she actually studies & lives in Cape Town, South Africa



Straßburger

3-channel video installation by Markus Wendling

Beginning his epic novel with the statement „*I'm not Stiller*“, Max Frisch's great fictional creation frees itself from all the roles and parameters with which society assesses and oppresses him. But actually you cannot so easily escape the gaze of others. Sartre said „*l'enfer c'est les autres*“ (hell is other people). For it is society that wishes to define, categorise and pigeon-hole the “individual”, even though this Latin word stands for the ‘undivided’.

Markus Wendling counteracts this restrictive thinking with his 3-channel video installation, showing a person who not unsuccessfully attempts to take part in various activities. Who is Henning Straßburger? Wendling depicts him seeming to be a painter one moment, but a pop singer or a conductor the next. Is Straßburger at any given time only one of these figures or is he always all of them at once? It seems as if this person is an individual in the true sense of the word. Not in the way you might think, but because a person always represents an indivisible whole, albeit one with constantly shifting facets of personality and talent.

One might call these facets identities. In Wendling's piece you do not see a fixed identity, but multiple concurrent identities, all of which reside within Henning Straßburger. He splits the „multiple personality“ Straßburger on its individual components, to disclose how classical genres have dissolved into the cross-media world and the genre of thinking has become obsolete. Straßburger drifts from one state to another and leaves it up to commentators to judge his pictures as a painter, his music videos as a pop singer or his appearances as a conductor. The boundaries are loose. Only the ‘now’ matters.







Wending sees his work as not only relating to Straßburger. Rather, the installation should be an exhortation not to limit oneself, neither physically nor mentally. Every person has various identities. Some are often suppressed and thus talent that could possibly enrich the lives of others falls into oblivion. It is important to remember that you can never experience a personality by looking just at one facet of the whole person. In fact, a great writer has already made this very point by beginning a book with the statement „*I'm not Stiller*“.



Markus Wendling

born 1980 in Frankfurt am Main

Professional apprenticeship in photography in Frankfurt am Main

Media Production (Bachelor of Arts) at the University of Applied Sciences OWL

Media Art and Design (Master of Fine Arts) at the Bauhaus University Weimar

Wending works as a freelance photographer, media producer and occasionally as a journalist, as a lecturer in film culture and as a curator of art exhibitions. His photographic works and videoart pieces are exhibited in museums and galleries. He lives and works in Weimar.

IdEntity



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SUPPORTED BY

**Bauhaus-Universität
Weimar**

Chair for Experimental Radio

PUBLISHER

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung
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The laboratory of form ideas

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Gabriele Rabe, Markus Wendling

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(foreword)
Mareike Maage (text „Pendant“)

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Bonaventure Soh Bejeng Ndikung,
Claudia Lamas Cornejo, Maximilian
Werkhausen, Sonja Hartmann,
Stephanie Bader, Martin Neuhaus
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