

Peter Weibel: *When did you begin your photographic work and what were your first themes?*

Jürgen Klauke: In the art book "Ich + Ich" ("I + I") of 1969/70, I was still using photographs as a supporting medium. That was an attempt to bring a sense of objectivity to the subjective approach of a sketch diary, to give the observer another dimension.

This already pointed forward to the photographic work and large-scale series which followed (self-portrayal, dramatisation, separated object-worlds, references to isolation, sexuality, violence etc.) It was this approach that finally made me decide to use the photograph as the medium for my work. What interested me was not photography as such, but allowing my thoughts and images to be captured on film.

The "Physiognomien" ("Physiognomies", 1972/73), (p.12/13) never showed Klauke himself, always a "projected self". One saw Klauke, but there was always some other person too, whether male or female. To be only one person, to have only one identity, seemed to be "no option" ("Keine Möglichkeit") – the title of a 1975 project of yours which you did at the Galerie de Appel in Amsterdam with Ulay. Was that also the origin of the 2nd title of this project: "Keine Möglichkeit – zwei Platzwunden" ("No option – two lacerations")?

Of course the never-ending search for my / our identity is an underlying theme here: to lustfully claim female identity or any form of "otherness", and therefore question both "eternal masculinity" and "eternal femininity"; i.e. to break through conventional, limited views of how things should be. To perceive one's own limitations and acquire the "otherness" of other people according to one's own needs – with little chance of success, as the title of that particular performance suggests.

Do the "Physiognomies" use make-up, disguises, objects and props to stage a theatre of subjects, the discovery of identity through otherness? Is the aim to find the identity of the self through a multitude of other identities? After all, this is not a staged photographic documentation of social typologies. In fact this ap-

proach à la Sanders and others after him (such as Ruff) is parodied by you, e.g. in the work "Das menschliche Antlitz im Spiegel soziologisch nervöser Prozesse" ("The human face as reflected in sociologically nervous processes", 1976/77), where you depict the judge, the anarchist, the priest, the murderer etc. alternating with identical photographs of yourself (now smiling, now serious).

I do not assume other roles, I don't want to be a woman or any other person, and I'm certainly not striving for unity and divine perfection – if anything it's the "happy hybrid". It's still possible to find your own identity through that of others – a raising of consciousness, a reaching out for the limits – and with a little luck perhaps even beyond.

That's the psychological way of looking at it – since I'm a creative artist, all I'm doing is to take these general ideas – which are not only mine – and produce images and sketches in the broadest sense of the word which convey something of their meaning.

"Das menschliche Antlitz ..." is one of my favourite works of the seventies: it shows exactly the opposite. Using economical mimicry I denounce or deconstruct hackneyed typologies, or the belief in them, and I make a cheerful pact with those denounced. I'm not acting out types – pictorially they exist only as words. A word-image combination which irritates and therefore encourages a critical view.

What is the origin of this theatre of fictional identities, this drama of multiple subjects? This dramatic conflict, this antagonistic tension within the subject itself, is particularly impressive in the 10-part photo sequence "Einzelgänger" ("Loner", 1975), where there is typically not one Klauke but two. What is the meaning of this playing around with variable positions of the subject?

Here I am addressing the insoluble conflict with ourselves, the "sweet failure" it brings us which – if it doesn't drive us mad – can make our existence quite entertaining.

These are images of those often fleeting, subconscious encounters with ourselves, even as far as permitting a split – they are images of the beauty and the terror within us.

Is this monographic presentation of the variety of subjects a requisite of post-modernism, just as the variable zones of visibility within the photographic image are another requisite of post-modernism? Would it be possible to summarise the first period of your work with these two conditions, which exert a mutual influence both in terms of form and content? On the one hand the sequential character of your images, on the other hand the sequential character of your subjects? The development of variable positions of "I" in staged photographic sequences? Are your works formally "tableaux" because the subject is defined in content terms as a "tableau" as a stage?

As an observer and commentator you can look back, trace a historical pattern and evaluate. To some extent your colleagues Lischka and Dickel are in agreement with what you say about me, i.e. that I fulfilled certain conditions of post-modernism at an early stage.

I certainly helped photography to achieve a crucial breakthrough, which was to overcome the modernist photograph and to make photography a raw material or medium of graphic art. But working with this medium also has to do with the artful deception of photography and its effect – an uninhibited approach to photographs and the belief in the "truth" of photography. The public has approached/still approaches my work and is confronted with something different.

After all, the sequences, tableaux, essays and photo installations are extensions of the one-dimensional view of an image. They are methods of presenting an image in a certain way, they allow new dimensions, new readings, they undermine the photograph's claim to factual representation and they seek out what is real.

As far as the varying positions of the self are concerned – in other words my own more or less constant presence in the picture: here I'm using my own presence to emphasise the identity of the image (the image as a reinforcement / a medium for concepts). My constant presence as an artistic motif means that I am no longer an individual person but am all things (symbolically) – including the image itself.

Of course in your works of the seventies you articulated two major strategies of post-modernist art or

»Beseelung« (3tlg.), 1991, je 80x60 cm

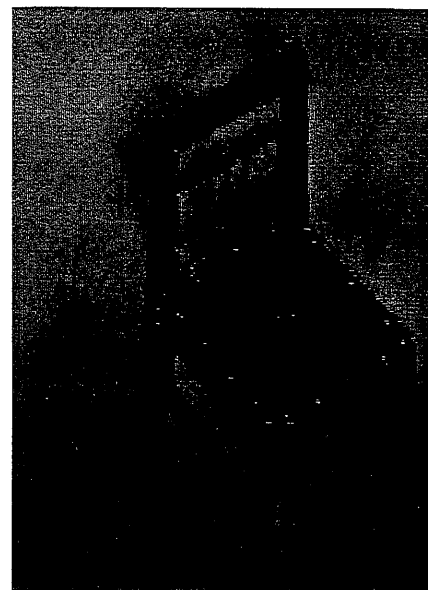


photography in Europe before these developed in the "appropriation art" of the eighties in the USA, for example as an allegorical impulse.

Do you see in these two postmodern conditions of photography, or of your art, a connection with the works of Cindy Sherman, Barbara Kruger etc.?

The American artists you mention resort mainly to finished media products or they adopt this role. Such works become less effective by being reproduced. There is a superficial affinity with Cindy Sherman in so far as she also used self-portrayal and the medium of the photograph, with which she exposed the American dream in the middle and late seventies.

I have more faith in my own pictures. However much reflection and rumination there may be, I need the element of playfulness – not knowing exactly where one is going or how it's going to end, inventing the world again and again for oneself – in pictures. In many "art products" which bear the "postmodern" seal, plurality seems to me to be mistaken for arbitrariness – the recycling of Duchamp's work is becoming espe-



cially popular in this orgy of confusion. In reality we have long been back in a kind of perverted modernism – breaking down boundaries but withdrawing into micro-nationalities at the same time – an electronically controlled and media-saturated world which everyone thinks they know, but as it is bodiless, they haven't touched it, smelt it or fucked it.

In this escalation of consumerism as quality of life – or content and speed as an escape or an excuse – the never-ending questions about ourselves and the world have not decreased in number. I cannot change the world with my art, but by articulating it over and over again in my art, I can help to spell it out.

In 1982, G. J. Lischka described the first period of your work as a "draft of a self-portrait as a portrayal of society". But then you begin a phase in which the subject is staged within an object, or as the title of one work puts it: "Ich war eine Dose" ("I was a can", 1986. *Der Körper verschwindet, die Objekte tauchen auf*/The body vanishes, the objects appear.) After the travesties, androgynies and transformations of the self, after



the dramatisations of the self as subject, after the works with and on the body, after the duels and duets between people, the eighties saw the development of relationships between objects and subjects: "Formalisierung der Langeweile" ("Formalisation of boredom", 1980/81) and "Sonntagsneurosen" ("Sunday neuroses"): In the play of relationships between objects, e.g. chairs, tables, buckets, in other words household utensils, articles of everyday use, and between people, i.e. man and woman, the structures of empirical reality becoming extraordinarily twisted. What is the origin of this new obsession with objects in the eighties, after a preoccupation with the body in the seventies?

You mustn't forget that the works you are referring to from the seventies played on other themes and forms too. Here are a just a few examples:

"Der Lauf der Dinge"

("The way of the world") (p. 24/25)

"Ewig Dein"

("Forever yours")

"Ich dachte – ich würde verrückt"

("I thought I was going mad")
"Ich dachte – ich wäre tot"
("I thought I was dead")
"Schußfolge – Schlußfolge"
("sequence of shooting – final episode")
"Viva – España"
"Hier – Sein"
("Being – here") etc.

All these experiences of life and images culminate in the large group of works "Formalisierung der Langeweile" ("Formalisation of boredom"). Everything that was dissected before is now brought together both in form and content to one whole entity – this is where all the threads converge. And objects have found their place more firmly too. Objects have their part to play in determining our lives. We are not conceivable without them and vice versa. We change just as little as they do. In "Sunday neuroses", this is portrayed with absolute economy. The objects merge with the figure or with other objects. They are in dialogue with them, they are what they are. At the same time they bear meaning, and are equally present and employed as a form and representing image.

Why the change from the inner life of the person, depicted to extremes in the seventies, to the "Innenleben der Dinge" ("Inner life of things", 1979/80)?

That sounds as if I started with something completely new in 1980. I think I have dealt with the answer to that question in what I have said so far. The sketch book, which you refer to amongst other things in my last catalogue "prosecuritas", was done then (1979/80) and today I tend to see that as a forerunner of the same group of works. Contours, inner life, X-ray-like shadowing, skeletal reduction. 15 years later I arrive at a new visual aesthetics via the "dramatised luggage conveyor bands", upon which I force my visual ideas and again my own self. This other outward image reveals the inner nature of the subjects and objects. It is a vehicle through which I reflect the new machines and the world of the media. Its different effect conveys something of the departure of the previously imagined reality and points forward to future images.

These new displaced, deranged scenarios, where relationships between objects and human beings are twisted, distorted, reversed, turned upside down in a number of ways – what is being heightened here, what is being transported? (cf. the titles "Steigerungspänomen"/"Heightening phenomenon", 1990/92, and "Entrückungserlebnis"/"Experience of being transported", 1990/92)? Are you trying to develop a visual way of thinking, a mad world of images as a correlative for a world that has itself gone mad? A neurotic, psychotic visual world for a psychotic real world? Is this the revolution of the object? An execution of the subject? The capitulation of man to the power of the world? These totally distorted relationships between human beings and objects, and between human beings amongst themselves and objects amongst themselves even in the photographic works of the eighties – do they reflect a total unleashing of the inferno of post-modern civilisation?

Since the pictures the world supplies are not sufficient, I try to define my subjective experiences in a new way using my own pictures – the here-and-now.

Your description of my visual way of thinking in mad images for a mad world (gone mad?) is nearer the truth, I think. Your subsequent questions reveal themselves as finite statements – they are a part of my motivation to make pictures which at best reflect something of these themes, sometimes in association with the poetry of a title (e.g. "Entrückungserlebnis" from the "Sonntagsneurosen"). It is left to you to imagine what is being "transported" or "heightened". It certainly isn't the overworked idea of postmodernism: whenever that marches up as a movement, it appears massive, but also highly dubious.

I said a lot on that subject in my performances "Postmoderne – hab' mich gerne" ("Postmodern – love me dearly"), in "Von hier aus" ("From where I stand"), of 1985 and "Zweitgeist" ("Second-hand Zeitgeist") at the Documenta 8/1987.

What is the symbolic function of objects in the eighties?

There isn't one. I assume you are referring to the works of the eighties and nineties.

In the state of boredom, the chair is at the centre of events, in the impact with the object and in the distance with it, there is no time to reveal its form of existence. Isolated, multiplied, interacting with the subject(s), it creates space for itself as a form, but also for states such as peace, time, holding still, etc. and also says something about the power of objects.

Especially in the static/focused works of the "Sonntagsneurosen", I feel the subjects are like objects in that they evoke a sense of present absence or absent presence – shortly before a nervous breakdown or an imminent outburst of violence.

The table as a stage-world within a tiny space. The apparent reality of the medium of photography enhances this impression.

What is the symbolic function of your body in the seventies?

The word "symbol" suggests definitions which I don't address. At the end of the sixties I regarded the body as a raw material for both the photographic works and the performances which I started in 1975. In the dramatised photographic works, which officially begin with "Self-Performance", the body is ego-centred, constructed / staged wish-machine etc. It is more actionistic than life running parallel to it – it comes from life (experience) into the picture (reflected) – perhaps more authentic.

The moving body of the seventies bringing life into art is present in the picture – just like today (in different exterior / interior conditions) – as bearer of an idea (I) and representative (You) or, for example,

"mit mir die Welt darstellen"
("depicting the world with me")
"Das Ich – als Spiegel der Gesellschaft"
("The self – as a mirror of society")
"Das Ich – als Kunstfigur"
("The self – as a figure of art")
"Das Ich – als Bild"
("The self – as an image")
"Das Ich, an den inneren und äußeren Rändern"
("The self, at the inner and outer edges")

Translation: Baker & Harrison