

If I would write you a letter with photographs or maybe send you a video ...

It is only noticeable if you watch, or rather listen, very carefully that it is not Kerstin Honeit who is speaking. Four women have lent their voices to the artist; they are telling some stories about how they experienced their fathers' funerals. Four women – four plays. It is a simple stage (a green screen box) that Kerstin Honeit has built. There is a white space (a white cube); in it, only Honeit dressed in a black suit (her black box), nothing to draw the viewer's attention away from her performance. Her 'white cube' suggests neutrality; her 'black box,' integrity/seriousness. There is, however, a third element that lives in that

space—emptiness. Emptiness due to the way that Western society deals with death and that finds its expression in rituals formalized in order to mediate this inevitable fact. The artist performs the recognizable demeanor of someone giving a eulogy. In doing so, dressed in her black suit, she transforms borrowed memories, using her lips and her body, through the valedictions of others. *On and Off* (video installation, 2010) simultaneously shows Honeit as the protagonist, substitute, and performer. Through these multiple voices, she pursues questions of the performative role in significant and symbolic social initiations.



On & Off (2010)



Becoming 10
 Photo Installation (2007- 2010)
 23' x 8' 2"
 9 framed photos, 21 pinned photos
 Photographer: Francesca Bondy

their locations, has led her to nine different places in East and West Berlin. The artist is the last child in an unusual family constellation that only exists in the form of genealogy.

Almost like a detective, Honeit has attempted to draw close to her nine half-siblings through an investigation of their home environments. Near her half-siblings' homes she photographically captured herself in masquerades of everyday situations. These photographs appear like stills from a film, a silent film missing lines for the performers. In order to simulate the not-present, she represents her potential siblings in sites where they actually live and embodies the absentees by imagining their demeanor. Honeit's versions make her half-siblings into archetypes that could be met on the average Berlin street. Because she uses archetypes, it's evident that there is a distance between Honeit and her siblings. Her masquerade momentarily disturbs the social order by embodying a desire and search for different identity. Her attempts to create a symbiosis with family members she has never met are made physical through a mimetic process missing an original. Perhaps there's an echo in "I'll Keep It With Mine" (the Bob Dylan song Nico sang on her album Chelsea Girls): "I'm not loving you for what you are, but for what you are not."

Act 1: I'm not loving you for what you are, but for what you are not.

Jacques Lacan says that love is destructive if it becomes a projection surface.¹ A filmmaker, set designer, sculptor, and performer, Honeit is prolific in her artistic activity and in *Becoming 10* (photographic installation, 2007-10) her performative activities reach a high point. In this piece she does not depict one person in four different situations as in *On and Off*, rather, since 2007 she has worked on creating imagined personifications and has developed into the roles of nine different characters.

In *Becoming 10*, Honeit has become an anthropologist in search of the nine siblings she has never met. Her research into their backgrounds and above all,



¹"I love you, but inexplicably I love something in you more than yourself, and therefore I destroy you". -Slavoj Zizek
zitiert in "Der Faktor X" die Formel des Begehrens als Jaques Lacan's Motto. Slavoj Zizek. Faktor X. Das Ding und die Leere. Kapitel 1: Das unergründliche Genießen. Audio CD, Köln 2003.

Act 2: Not Me

"Starting to talk about the 'I', the confusion of terms became especially noticeable. The only way I could manage was by establishing the terms 'the big I' and 'the small i'. In my use of the term 'the small i', I mean the condition of a conscience that has awareness of its own incompleteness, that is to say that my definition of 'conscience' means: an 'i' who is aware of its mortality and gender. Whereas 'the big I' is abstract and conforms to the fantasy of 'completeness'. This 'big I' is omnipotent and offers unlimited possibilities; it is simultaneously male and female and therefore gender free. In contrast to 'the small i', it is a creation of the mind and requires the downfall of the 'small i' to be able to materialize."²

— Christina von Braun
22 Statements About the Self

The omnipotent "big I" lurks in different forms in all of Kerstin Honeit's work. In her interactive 2009 video installation *Read My Lips* (not included in *Ambiguity is My Weapon*), 'the big I' has transformed itself into a black box. Shown in Germany in a black box room is a black and white projection of four scenes from American Hitchcockesque films. The scenes chosen by Honeit are from movies released in postwar Germany that were redubbed by the Hollywood studios to censor issues of the recent war history, sexuality, and gender play. Opposite the screen is a lectern with a microphone and a teleprompter that viewers are invited to use. The films are silent. The microphone allows viewers to dub in the characters' lines. When subtitles light up on the teleprompter, Christina von Braun's 'small i'— the 'i' that embodies incompleteness—comes into

play. Honeit demands the viewer to look carefully. Her offered subtitles present the dubbed German release dialogue, and therefore will not sync up to the speaking rhythms of the characters that silently mouth the original Hollywood lines. How can 'the big I' be formed through the manipulability of the dubbing process? If the viewer is able to master the art of lip-reading, they have the advantage of understanding the censorings through an embodied knowledge. Honeit places the enacted original narrative between the text of the dubbed censoring and the visuality of the original scene, performing the social manipulation of the dubbings in the voice to raise awareness of cultural and sexual stereotyping of 1940s Hollywood and Germany. Kerstin Honeit plays with these issues and asks 'the small i' to perform the story.

²Christina von Braun: 22 Statements zum Selbst. In: KUNSTFORUM international. Die Kunst der Selbstdarstellung. Band 181, 2006, S. 59.