

A.B. Meadows

They Are Not to Be Separated: Art and the Business of Living A Few Thoughts about Art, the Artist, and the Public in the Context of Public Projects by Jochen Gerz

"die Menschen sind voller Potentiale und ich glaube einfach an die Leute" (Jochen Gerz)

Jochen Gerz is a very special, very different artist in today's art world. And a very unassuming, neighborly, in a way also a direct and straightforward guy. Not intrinsically shying away from "common-sense," from that which is down-to-earth. When he talks about that business of living (1) which he made his own, by choice or by chance or the force of circumstance, when he talks about art, he can compare it for instance with playing soccer. There, he says, you make a point or you don't, you play well or you don't. At the end, everybody sees and understands the result.(2) No tricks can obscure it. In art, he seems to suggest, that's not as self-understood. Hype, pretension, the phony exist. And they are not always easily recognized as such.

Perhaps it's not very relevant in a piece of supposed "art criticism" to dwell on "attitudes" of an artist.(3) And yet, I'm tempted to ask, What does it mean for his art that this artist, Gerz, shuns pretension like the devil would shun the priest's holy water? Perhaps it means that he isn't aiming at commercial success, that he isn't really involved in a clever strategy of marketing his wares, that what matters to him very much is not the kind of recognition by art critics that would assure his being coveted as a producer of highly-sought-after, expensive

merchandise. I sense that he's after something else: He tries to produce insights. Emotional insights. Insights that spring from an awakened (or re-awakened) memory. From that perhaps unexpected occurrence that you might begin to be probing something deep down in yourself who confronts his art projects. It presupposes that a chord is touched. That something happens between the art work, the art project and her or him (at any rate, an individual in a given society, at a given moment in history) who chooses to turn to, and perceive, and marvel, think, dream about what he has just encountered. Or encountered a day ago, a week ago, a year ago.

Insights are difficult to sell. Especially if they vibrate and oscillate in a kind of phlogiston, the non-being, the nothingness of the imaginary that is shared by the artist and her, or him, who has been "spoken" to, and who responds.(4)

But, you see, everything depends on the fact that she or he "reponds." They become his co-workers, co-authors.

Those not involved so much in the visual arts as in literature have known this for long. Some at least. That literary production by the writer, in order to be completed, must be followed by a second (act of) production. Arbatov knew it.(5) Tretjakov and others knew it. Brecht comprehended it.

In the visual arts (painting, drawing, for instance), the finished work is there, a complete (or so it seems to be) object.(6) Thrown at your feet. Or attached to the wall. You can pick it up or let it rot. But it is there, it seems. In a sense, static - not dynamic.(7) Reception seems to limit

itself to seeing "what is there," the completed work, the work complete: embodying emotions, thoughts, desires, perhaps jokes, perhaps the *mauvaise foi* of the maker. But it all appears as reified.(8) The commodification process is enhanced by this way of "being there." It makes it so much easier to sell a painting than it would be to sell a poem. What's a poem? The paper it has been written on? No. The ink? No. If you remember it after reading it and throw away that slip of paper, it still exists. The painting, our superficially "materialistic," in a way quite mistaken perception tells us, ceases to exist when we destroy it.(9) The commodification process, I said, profits from this fact. Every painting is (theoretically) a rare, a unique good - in German they have this nice term for such a good, they call it a *Unikat*. Not a serial product of which two or more copies exist. Just this one, this single material object, unlike every other. Destroy a book, and other copies will exist. Destroy all the copies of a poem, and somebody will remember it and write it down again, or pass it on orally like they passed on long epic poems in Homer's time, and still pass on epic poems in Mongolia, and pass on poems among the *bedouins*, in the Arab world.

And still, as Sartre pointed out, even the painting, as far as its aesthetic presence is concerned, "isn't there" in its materiality, it "exists" more truly, more fully in the space of the imagination, that is to say, in the mind of him who opens himself towards it, who perceives and explores and dives into and marvels about what he has seen. Consciously, but of course pre-consciously, as well.(10)

The discovery that a reception process is in no way to be reduced to an onslaught, to "suffering" (passively) on

onslaught of colors, forms, tensions (or of words, contexts, significations in literature) was in the air in the 1930s and 40s. Marxist writers in Soviet Russia like Arbatov, who were not unaware of the productive contribution of Shklovsky and other "formalists," discovered the active side of the reception process.(11) And they owed to Shklovsky and his friends at least the insight that art, productive, innovative, that is real rather than epigonic art is about "de-automatization."(12) Transcending Shklovsky's formalist interpretation of "de-automatization," they concluded that the "new art" that was necessary challenges (or at least has the potential to challenge) engrained world-views (thus, stereotypes, clichés, auto- and hetero-images) in the "reader." (They were after all concerned with written art, but mind you, it is possible and necessary to "read" visual art, as well).

Bert Brecht followed in the footsteps of these thinkers, incorporating their basic insight into the desirable, required, necessary increase of the active component of reception (as a "second", complementary aspect of the aesthetic production accomplished by the creative artist) into his theory and practice as a dramatist.(13) As Brecht wrote in 1948, "art can only orientate itself if it moves on. And it must do so together with the progressive part of the population, and not away from them. Together with them, it must leave behind a state of waiting for treatment [i.e. an attitude or a condition where art and where the people are waiting "to be dealt with" by others], and turn active."(14)

Of course, his most relevant teacher, Karl Korsch, in refuting the mechanically determinist interpretations of Marxist thought by "orthodox" ideologues, had

emphasized the criterion of human praxis as the source of all insight, development, and real emancipation.(15) If Brecht wanted to activate the individuals in the audience, hoping to reawaken their potential to think on their own accord, in order to move on to autonomous, self-determined action (rather than letting others think for them, and then letting these "masters" lead them into action), it was in line with the discoveries made in the field of aesthetic theory in Russia, and with the social-philosophical position developed by Karl Korsch.(16)

It boiled down, as far as art and literature is concerned, to the demand that artists and writers should presuppose (and therefore, also, seek to address) the active "recipient." And it confronted the typical "recipient" (reader, viewer) with the demand that he stop asking what a literary or a visual work of art "was all about," that he would begin to question his reliance on third-rate art critics and literary critics who were telling him this and that in the newspapers. That he stop asking the author questions like, "What do you intend to say in your work?" when he could after all access it himself and make up his own mind. Or rather, question his own preconceptions, and admit to being puzzled, even amazed, if this was the more honest response. The task to perceive, to wonder, to grope, to pose questions lay on his shoulders. Not on anybody else's. Even when it was admissible to read and think about what others had to say.

It would be the mediocre ones who'd be cocksure to have the "simple and correct interpretation." The ones ready to wipe out the multi-layeredness of a work of art. Or of any human act, any human situation for that matter. How

did Erich Fried write in one of his poems? "He says he can read you like an open book. And he thinks that every book he reads, he can also understand." (--) Something like this, I think.

And Chuang-tzu, the Chinese sage? He talked of the depth where the roc plays, that mythical animal whose wings are spread over entire provinces.[\(17\)](#) An allusive statement that was to provoke the notion of the fathomless individual, and even more, of the fathomless "human universe." You decipher one layer, and you chance upon another. And the more you know, owing to philosophical AND empirical exploration, thanks to reason AND intuition, the more you recognize that the realm, the space of that which you don't know gets ever vaster.

Today, "after Einstein," modern physics is not in disagreement with this theoretically relevant insight that seems to exclude all dogmatic ways of enshrining "the truth," an untranscendable and unchangeable "scientific (or social-scientific) knowledge," and certainly also all cocksure prescriptions for a human paradise, a prefabricated utopia. Democracy has become a permanent, unfinished project, unfinishable, in a sense, yet demanding to be worked on.[\(18\)](#) The "revolution" in that sense has indeed become permanent: a revolution in our understanding of our tasks, our duties, our responsibilities as individuals, as subjects who see scarcity, hunger, deforestation, poisoned yet vast (or should I say, vast yet poisoned?) oceans.

Am I moving away from a discussion about art and, more specifically, the work of Jochen Gerz? No. It's

linked. The insight that art is, by its very nature, essentially, projective. It transcends itself. It protrudes, injects its fragmentary existence into the space of the imagination; it is a form of the Not Yet, the Noch nicht Ernst Bloch talked about.(19) And it exists in the same continuum as the rest of our praxis; it is living (at least, should be living art) and thus exists (or should exist) in relation to us, to our "human universe." Not a "for itself", but "for us," "in relation to us." (20)

And it thus corresponds with a basic human trait, which is our situatedness,(21) within imperfection, irrationality, injustice, inadequacies.

Even if society would be perfect, if democracy would be perfect (and they never will be, no matter how much, and perhaps significantly, man will be able to effect improvements), we are - every one of us - inadequate from the start. Learners. Beginners. Groping, Growing. Developing. Like a small budding flower. Like the beginnings of a tree starting of into his lifespan as a tree. "Men are full of potential", Jochen Gerz said.(22) Sure. They are like flowers, able to bloom. If you deny them water, if you tread on them, they won't. And in contrast to flowers whose metaphorical "urge" to bloom will always, quite naturally, exist, other men and women can undermine an individual's self-esteem and confidence and thus the "will," the "desire" to "bloom."

Gerz, who is so focused on individuals at a time of massively pushed "uniformity" and "conformism" (disguised, however, as plurality by different "trends" in the world of political and aesthetical fashions), speaks interestingly of "man" in the plural: "men." Men, people

can develop what is inside them, as potential, as a creative potential to transcend that which is. That which they are. Some would add, yes, but only jointly - only in the context of a politically conscious effort that they join in, as disempowered ones, as wounded ones, as those kept stupid on purpose, and as those who are marginalized and excluded. "Being alone, remaining alone, you will be defeated. You'll give up, end in apathy, resignation, perhaps even misanthropy or despair. Or in something that the psychiatrists will call a psychic illness, a way of being sick." Are they entirely wrong?

So much is clear to me: the starting point, the beginnings, rest in you. It's a matter of your felt deficiency, scarcity, needs. Your confrontation with your suppressed fears and anxieties and aggressive impulses. Your felt, your perceived and embraced hopes. It's always the individual who wakes up, or who doesn't.

There are those who, for good reason, say, Yeah - but: Aren't the conditions, the circumstances having an effect on your chances to "wake up" and try a "head start", try to make a change, in your life, your way of seeing yourself, seeing the world, and relating to the world? Isn't it that there are socio-psychological factors at work - in the education system, in the media, in the prevalent discourses, even in the "atmosphere" that prevailed in the home where you were brought up? Such "factors" (or shouldn't one rather say, such "forces"?) can encourage you, or discourage you. They can turn you into a certain direction very early on, and then, for all your life, like an automaton almost, you keep walking in that direction. Is that nonsense? No, not quite. It's clear, bourgeois kids raised in a mansion have a better chance to go to

university than the kids of the trash collector. They have a better chance to "learn music," get piano lessons, and be taken to a vernissage or a museum at a fairly young age. They have a better chance to articulate themselves in a way considered "proper" in those circles where people raise philosophical questions. And yet. And yet. Isn't there the working class kid taken to a theater performance by his teacher, the only one in a class of working-class kids in that English factory town, who was shaken by the experience? Who began to love and care for and explore literature? Who became, not a mechanic, but a book-seller in London, and all the angry young poets came and read poems in his kitchen when they were still quite unknown: Pete Brown, Mike Horovitz, and Frances. Libby Houston, Perhaps Adrian Mitchell, too. I'm talking of Friderun's husband, Cyril Barrow. Bad example? An exception which proves nothing? No, it proves what could have been happening to the others if the odds hadn't been against them; it proves and disproves the Marxist point of view at the same time. The social situation determined their "chance" to wake up at exactly that moment when Cyril was "moved" by something, an urge inside him, a desire touched when he saw the new "reality," the play, its strange intensity: a world that had been unknown to him until then. Cyril was changing, and it happened "against the odds," because he let it happen. It seems almost impossible to me to separate the inward (active) force at work and the outward thrust, the energy that reached him when viewing the performance. Yes, we are conditioned, situated, under the "influence" of social forces, in a Capitalist class society today. Yes, we are able to transcend that which conditions us; it's a matter of the

"creative" potential in everyone of us. "Creative" has no other meaning than "the potential to create, to transcend that which is, that which (but not in a philosophically 'strict' sense) 'determines' us."

It is this discovery which I sense at the root of Jochen Gerz' aesthetic (and thus, social and political) concept, at the root of his self-definition as an artist (a human being who sets free his creative potential), at the root of his understanding of his art works, his "projects." In a way, it is what is Brechtian in his approach.(23)

Without doubt, I am tempted to say, Gerz, too, aims at what Brecht must have aimed at: to startle an audience, a public, individuals in an anonymous crowd. Yes, individuals, after all. And this surprisingly enough to shake them out of their routine. All those thoughts, feelings, ways of behaving that have become customary. Much too customary, too engrained, perhaps. Some will refer to all this stuff that is buried deep inside us, and that we tend to reproduce unthinkingly, taking it for granted, as the dominant thoughts of an era. A vision du monde, or Weltanschauung that has us in its grip. Some will call it the esprit, the structural make-up of a socio-culture. Some will look at it from the point of view of social psychology, or psychoanalysis. Others yet will question it insofar as it includes stereotypes, automatisms. It's not up to me at this point to decide which approach is most lucidly highlighting whatever we perpetuate in our lives, our thoughts, emotions, our practice, all that which is "practico-inert" about it, as Sartre thought. Whatever view of the "engrained" may be most telling, most to the point, I think Gerz is right in emphasizing his hope and his expectation that routine, seeming "passivity," the

"inertia" inscribed in stereotyped forms of behaving, of thinking, even of feeling, that the compulsion to repeat "mistakes" (referred to so tellingly as Wiederholungszwang in German) are not the only dimension of our psychic and intellectual, our active and our contemplative life. Yes, there exists something else in us. Something that is curious, awake, capable of empathy, of love, of questioning that which is, or which seem to be, "too much of a certainty." And isn't it true that, at least at the back of our minds, we sense its presence, its possibility to grow and unfold? Not only in the "arts" but in our lives, this "other" quality, this "other" seminal thirst to discover and make things new exists, without any doubt. Whatever speaks to this "other" quality in us, reaches us best, in the most intimate, honest, uncompromising way. Love, art, poetry, togetherness, the warmth of being involved in an unbiased, disinterested act of solidarity, the sisterly moves implied in constellations of mutual help, they all imply the "other," that which is not "dominated" in us, not "manipulated," not a result of education with the carrot and the stick. Moving, opening us, so unafraid, towards others, towards the Other, Unknown, Unexperienced, Strange, we experience our liberation and we liberate the Opposite Other we face. Liberate the Other, from fearful anticipation of rejection. Of being misunderstood. Of being "invisible," even. So it is a way of discovering the Strange. The Strange in art, in foreign ways of behaving, in foreign cultures. There are two sources that let us discover our option to do so, and our courage to turn to it: the creative source deep down inside us, deep inside every individual. And the open-minded encounter with the strange and perplexing in art.

Whether theater, the visual arts, literature, or public sculptures like the ones by Jochen Gerz.

Feb. 28 - Mar. 1, 2010

Notes

(1) The "business of living" - it's Pavese's phrase, of course, which alluded to the totality of existence, innocence and experience of the artist or anybody else, for that matter. (Cf. Cesare Pavese, *Il Mestiere di vivere (Diario 1935-1950)*. Torino 1952)

(2) Jochen Gerz, talking in: Martin Stuemper and Matthias Wurm, *"Eine kurze Geschichte von Jochen Gerz und der Kunst der Strasse"* (radio feature), 2010. Broadcast by WDR 5 public radio in Cologne on Feb. 13, 2010

(3) "Attitudes," or "positions taken" (Haltungen) embody of course a choice; they thus point towards a project, towards an understanding of our life, our "business of living" as a specific project. An insight owed of course to Jean-Paul Sartre. - Even before Sartre, Bert Brecht paid much attention to "Haltungen." As Paolo Chiarini has shown, "Brecht attains a free space for the word by introducing the gesticulatory ['gestic'(?); in German: 'gestisch'] element; in other words, he attains it thanks to the elaboration of a language that 'indicates specific attitudes which the speaker assume vis-à-vis other persons' " ([Brecht,] 'Ueber gestische Mimik' [On gesticulatory mimikry])." (Paolo Chiarini, "Thesen ueber Brecht", in: *Alternative, Zeitschrift fuer Literatur und Diskussion* # 72/73, June/August 1970, p. 127)

(4) Jean-Paul Sartre, *L'imaginaire*. Paris (Gallimard) 1940

(5) See Boris Ignat'evich Arvatov, *Kunst und Produktion*. Munich (Hanser) 1972; see also Boris I. Arvatov, Boris Ignat'evich Arvatov, *Sociologičeskaja poëtika*, Moskva

(Federacia) 1928

(6) This is even true of works by painters who were continuing to change, to "overpaint" their paintings, considering them, like Arshile Gorky, as "uncompletable." "Uncompletable" or not, they had reached a final, commodified state when they were sold, when they ended up in a living room or a museum.

(7) Is this why Jochen Gerz became disinterested in creating works that "hang on a wall"? Is it because they are "too complete", "too finished," "not enough of a process," not "dynamic" enough? Neither undergoing changes, not making aware of changes? And changes, awareness of changes, does it not imply for him awareness of our history and of the present? Clearly, the changes killed off, thwarted today, and the changes happening in an individual today, interest Gerz. All those changes that are happening against the odds. But also our suppression of historical consciousness, or our ritualization of "historical remembering." He seems to work against that. Yes. And so it is in that context that history is something continually referred to in some of Gerz' public projects. Not history as such, but exactly our history that "we" tend to forget about, to "automatize." That recent history which "we" tend to embed in "rituals of automatized remembrance," "rituals of routinely professed guilt." I speak, of course, of the situation of Germans in Germany. But it could be applied to other contexts as well. Do not most Americans also suppress historical awareness of the genocide that decimated the Native American population? Don't they reject any recognition of personal guilt, any recognition of a national responsibility regarding the terrible war in Vietnam that remains tied to Agent Orange, to defoliation and poisoning of vast landscape and their inhabitants, to massive bombing which surpassed everything seen during WWII? Who is ready today to face crimes like those in My Lai? Who acknowledges "we" were blind, we were wrong, we were too manipulated, too cowardly, too passively conformist - when we could at least face our inadequate civil courage, and unemancipated past now, three and a half decades after the end

of that war waged for nothing that cost so many innocent lives. In fact, nothing will change for the better, today and in the future, if we don't come to confront the past more truthfully. And this means, much more authentically.

(8) In Lukacs et Heidegger, Lucien Goldmann writes about a "central concept" of the philosophy of G. Lukàcs, that of reification ["celui de réification"], stating that in "departing from the famous analysis of fetishization of the commodity [Warenfetsch, fétichisme de la marchande] developped by Marx in the first chapter of Das Kapital, Lukàc, by substituting the word "reification" for the Marxian term, has developped a general theory of false consciousness to which he consecrated one half of his work and by which he showed how this reification, tied to production for the market, leads finally to diverse forms of false consciousness and to a perception of the outside world as a pure object susceptible only to being known and modified, to that which Heidegger called Vorhandenheit, which is found at the base of every objectivist interpretation and above all, of every metaphysics to the extent that it is a theory of being." ["A partir de la célèbre analyse du fétichisme de la marchandise développée par Marx dans le premier chapitre du Capital, Lukàcs, en substituant le mot de 'réification' au terme marxien, avait développée une théorie générale de la fausse conscience à laquelle il avait consacré la moitié de son ouvrage et dans laquelle il montrait comment cette réification, liée à la production pour le marché, aboutissait finalement aux différentes formes de fausse conscience et à la perception du monde extérieur comme pur objet susceptible seulement d'être connu et modifié, à ce que Heidegger appellera la Vorhandenheit, qui se trouve à la base de toute interprétation objectiviste et, surtout, de toute métaphysique en tant que théorie de l'être." (Lucien Goldmann, *Lukac et Heidegger. Pour une nouvelle philosophie*, Fragments posthumes établis et présentés par Youssef Ishaghpour. Paris (Denoel/Gonthier) 1973

(9) But juxtapose this view to that of Sartre who wrote: "Let us reflect for a moment on what happens when I apprehend the

portrait of Charles VIII as an image of Charles VIII. All of a sudden I stop seeing the painting as a part of the real world. [...] This painting as a *real* thing can be lighted to a greater or lesser extent, its colors can crumble away, it can burn. [...] Its objective nature depends on reality, taken as a spatial-and-temporal continuum. But if, on the contrary, I apprehend Charles VIII as image in the painting, the apprehended object can no longer be subject to lighting. It isn't true that the cheek of Charles VIII for instance can be more or less well-lighted. The light on this cheek has been decided once and for all by the painter in the imaginary, after all. It is the unreal sun - or the unreal candle which has been positioned by the painter in this or that distance from the face. And it is determining the degree to which the cheek is lighted. [...] if the painting should burn, it is not Charles VIII as a notion [as an imagination] that burns but simply the material object which serves as *analogon* for the manifestation of the imagined object. Thus the unreal object all of a sudden appears as unattainable in relation to reality." [My translation] (Jean-Paul Sartre, *Das Imaginäre*, Reinbek (Rowohlt) 1971, p.285)

(10) Cf., again, Sartre, opus cit.

(11) Arbatov, opus cit.

(12) Viktor Sklovskij, *Theorie der Prosa*, Frankfurt am Main (Fischer) 1966

(13) As Frederic Jameson saw it, it was at least useful to compare Bertolt Brecht's theory of estrangement (Verfremdungstheorie) to Shklovsky's theoretical views about automatization and de-automatization of literary forms. Verfremdung [estrangement] was a central category for Brecht, and the related verb verfremden means "to make strange." What mattered to the dramatist was not the artistic device as such but the resulting process that occurred in the active (or activated) mind of the actor and of the theatergoer who watched the performance. If the performance succeeded in "making

something [i.e. something seemingly well-known] look or appear strange" to the viewer, it implied that he or she was beginning to actively question hitherto unquestioned views or preconceptions. The viewer would start to think in a fresh and new way. Jameson underlines the fact that *Verfremdung* "means estrangement, like Shklovsky's Russian equivalent." (F. Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language, A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton, NJ 1972 p.58) But of course, Shklovsky's interest was that of a theoretician reflecting on aesthetics: his main concern was with the new formal, aesthetic device, or the new and different use of an already established formal device (*Kunstmittel*). This renewed, different use constituted "de-automatization" (*Entautomatisierung*), and it resulted in a fresher, different aesthetic perception of the work by the viewer. In a formal, aesthetic sense, it renewed the genre, and within the genre, the individual art work, regardless of what it had to say. Clearly, Brecht owed something to Shklovsky, and he in fact acknowledged the achievement of formally advanced pioneers (he mentioned radical innovators like Joyce and Dos Passos). But he was determined to transcend the position of those seemingly bent on (or, sometimes wrongly, accused of) purely formal innovation for its own sake.

(14) "Jedoch kann die Kunst sich nur orientieren, indem sie fortschreitet, und sie muss es tun mit den fortschrittlichen Teilen der Bevölkerung und nicht etwa von ihnen weg; mit ihnen muss sie aus dem Zustand des Wartens auf Behandlung zum Handeln kommen [...]" (Bertolt Brecht, *Schriften zum Theater* # 6, 1947-1956. Frankfurt am Main (Suhrkamp) 1964, p. 7

(15) Cf. Karl Korsch [Frankfurt (EVA)

(16) For Brecht as for Karl Korsch, the historicity (die Geschichtlichkeit, historical quality, die Gewordenheit) of empirical social reality (e.g. specific art forms, specific world views, specific social relations) was to be recognized as well as its VERÄNDERBARKEIT or "changability": the fact that it was

changeable, that it could be changed.

(17) [Chuang-tzu], *Chuang-tzu. Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic*, transl. from the Chinese by Herbert A. Giles. London (Unwin) 2nd ed. 1926

(18) This is, incidentally, a notion that was also highlighted by the Documenta 11...

(19) Ernst Bloch, *Philosophische Grundfragen. Teil 1: Zur Ontologie des Noch-Nicht-Seins: ein Vortrag und 2 Abhandlungen*. Frankfurt am Main (Suhrkamp) 1961

(20) Husserl asserted, convincingly, the "intentionality" of consciousness. (Edmund Husserl, *Ideen zu einer reinen Philosophie und phänomenologischen Philosophie; Buch 1, Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*. Halle (Max Niemeyer) 1913). - Consciousness is always "consciousness of" something, "about" something, and so is art - as a product, in part perhaps of chance, but in part always of consciousness and/or pre-consciousness, as well. So the "referential," in some way or other, is present in art; it is a layer or dimension of art. Even in the case of non-figurative works of art that renounce every "statement about" something. Here, the referential quality of the art work is inscribed in the fact that it bears witness to the refusal of the artist to "say something about" an interior or exterior aspect of the world. But this refusal is precisely a part of his own interior reality and of his 'rapport' to the social reality, insofar as he faces it as an artist. It is obvious that in addition to the referential aspect, other aspects or layers can be identified in a work of art.

(21) *Situatedness* (in German: *Situiertheit*) is a notion owed to Sartre... yet also rooted, at least vaguely, in a Marxist concept of anchoring lofty ideas in the solid ground of historically developing social reality (think of his famous phrase "vom Kopf auf die Füsse stellen"); in other words, in the insight of Marx that our way of thinking about society and ourselves, our ideas

boil down, in a way, to a rapport idéologique which reflects the given social (i.e., class) relations. But Marx, too, by his praxis as a theoretician and as a revolutionary, implicitly admitted that we are able to transcend "given" ways of thinking, dominant ideas that merely reflect the status quo. Departing from a historical situation, it is men [human beings] who by their (theoretical and physical) praxis, can MAKE HISTORY, i.e. they can contribute to actions that attempt to consciously change the status quo, aiming at greater justice, equality, brotherliness, liberty, in short, aiming at a "humanization" of (to a greater or lesser extent) inadequate if not inhuman circumstances.

(22) Jochen Gerz, in: M. Stuemper and M. Wurm, opus cit.

(23) If his public sculptures and other "works" (or "projects," as he frequently calls them) often are changing and finally even, disappearing works, this accentuates not only Gerz' rejection of the solidly static art works he once produced which are much more likely to be commodified and at the same time, to be integrated into a cultural sphere that isolates art works from the social reality where they were meant to "intervene," by putting them into an ivory tower, the museum. His non-static works also speak more urgently to us in a way that asks us to be active, activated, both with regard to art, to ourselves, and to the social reality we exist in. Another aspect of these works is that these same works make us sensitive to "change" (both within the art work in question, and beyond or outside it). These works often also "refer to" or "call to mind" or "evoke in us" history, memories of and emotions and thoughts "about" history. But, being activated, we do not see in then works that force a vision of history (say of the Nazi past in Germany, or of the " TIME OF THE GDR ") on us. They create a free space: not only for the imagination but also for OUR conscience, our emotions, thoughts, memories. They leave us free to think, to feel, to choose a position vis à vis the past and the present.

Interestingly, this again reminds me of Brecht's approach which was also addressing the critical individual, leaving him free to make his choice, inciting him to think, challenging him to face

history, to discover reality as historical, as changeable. As F. Jameson phrased it, "For Brecht, the primary distinction is not between things and human reality, not between nature and manufactured products, but rather between the static and dynamic, between that which is perceived as changeless, eternal, having no history, and that which is perceived as altering in time and being essentially historic in character." (Frederic Jameson, *The Prison-House of Language, A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism*. Princeton, NJ 1972, p.58) It may be noted in passing here that Brecht's play often were results of a work process that incorporated and thereby changed earlier "material." And as Magdi Youssef has shown, in his discussion of the performances of Brecht's plays in Egypt, they can become in turn subject to active, creative, productive changes that refute all academic notions centered on "faithfulness to the text." In Egypt, it was the necessity to depart from the needs and socio-cultural specificities of the recipients in a given context at a given time that prompted their actualization, and thus the creative use made of them. An idea Brecht would have loved.