

Jochen Gerz

Catalogue Raisonné

Introduction by Renate Petzinger and Volker Rattemeyer (Museum Wiesbaden and Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg 1999)

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What is the truth?

The catalogue of the exhibition in 1988 at the Art Collection North-Rhine-Westfalia in Düsseldorf shows works by Jochen Gerz in a many-sided dialogue. Statements of several years and various groups of his work on the media, on culture and on nature are involved. The work of Jochen Gerz provokes such references. The catalyst function of his Interactive Author projects in the nineties for example has its roots in his works of the sixties and seventies with their subversive dispute on language, image and media.

Already at an early stage, the siren sounds of the media world are perceivable in Gerz' work. His first computer installation is dated 1971 (CR 25), his first internet project 1995 (CR 117). The use of print media, photography, film and video – indispensable elements of Gerz' performances, installations and works in public space – permanently integrate new media technologies. In the debate regarding the art, the role of the artist and the object, the art critique and the viewer as well as of the museum are scrutinized again and again. The aspects of cultural debate in the work of Gerz neither exclude the gender subject nor the relationship to nature as environment and the presence of past, history and myth.

The awareness of transience which questions everything, the self-reaffirmation within time and the discourse about a truth which neither in life nor in art allows an unbroken existence any more are based on critical positions that are as relevant in the nineties as they were in the sixties. In addition to the principle of dialogue in the Düsseldorf catalogue, the chronological order of the present Catalogue Raisonné allows us to focus more distinctly than before on structural and chronological successions, directions and developments in Gerz' works. With our few short introductory remarks, we would like to offer some observations with this aim.

Performances and Works in Public Space 1968 – 1973

Between 1968 and 1973, Jochen Gerz realizes works that he himself refers to as pieces. They have performance quality and take place in public space. They are about the examination of art, a new interpretation of everyday reality and doubts about the own existence as an artist. With roots in literature and visual poetry Gerz considers himself as a writer until the early seventies. He approaches visual art hesitantly, suspicious of the art business and its institutions. Questions are allowed about the congruence of art and life. Strategies are developed for different views of everyday life. At this stage, performance is a medium that helps to gain foothold in visual arts. One has to be alive to perform and to give a performance appearance. This implies the possibility of a close approach to reality different from any autonomous piece of art or the mass media.

Characteristic for these pieces on examination of art is the printed message to an anonymous audience, inviting them to contemplate, act or – for the first time and by means of a questionnaire – reply. In his book "Annoncenteil" (Announcements), published by Luchterhand, Gerz writes the following about these works in transition between writer and writing artist: "Progressive texts are remove-from-papertexts to-

wards-places-streets houses-people-texts and back-to-papertexts. They nest inside a book like parasites and do not constitute themselves on paper. They happen everywhere, at any time and publicly. They have countless and nameless author-readers. They do not last until the page is turned and the reading is finished but only for the moment of their perception.' Examples are "Caution, Art Corrupts" (CR 1), "Ce soir à 23 heures 45 / This Evening at 11.45 p.m." (CR 4), "The Book of Gestures" (CR 5), "Befragung über die Kunst / Art Questionnaire" (CR 8), "Karten / Cards" (CR 11), "Is there Life on Earth" (CR 12) and "The New Phone Book of Paris" (CR 14).

In 1970/71, Gerz surrenders the actor's role to reality. He "finds" performances and actors on the street or in the park. The camera merely names and documents them. Part of this transformation of everyday reality into performance are "Pièce avec un aveugle / Piece With a Blind Man" (CR 13), "12 x La Santé" (CR 5), "Fotografieren, um fahren zu können, bis Du allein bist / To Photograph in Order to Drive until You are Alone" (CR 16), "Das Rauchen / The Smoking" (CR 17), "Pièce pour 1, 2, 3, 4 / Piece for 1, 2, 3, 4" (CR 18), "Pièce pour un laveur de carreaux / Piece for a Window Washer" (CR 19), "Donner de l'eau / Giving Water" (CR 20), "La Défoliation / Defoliation" (CR 21), "Der Baum, die Wiedergabe / The Tree and its Reproduction" (CR 22) and "Atmospherical Prints" (23).

In an interview in 1972, Gerz refers to himself as "someone who publishes himself". He remains skeptical of the role as an artist. In additional pieces, he examines his own self and his physical limits. He continues to question the rituals of an art business, which he mistrusts deeply. Examples are "Chauffer la terre / To Warm the Earth" (CR 24), "To Cry until Exhaustion" (CR 26), "Selfportrait" (CR 27), "Identification" (CR 29), "I sign your signature" (CR 31), "Schreiben mit der Hand / Hand-Writing" (CR 32), "Ausstellung von Jochen Gerz neben seiner fotografischen Reproduktion / Exhibition of Jochen Gerz Beside his Photographic Reproduction" (CR 33), "Parler / To Speak" (CR 34), "Italian Lecture of Thomas Jefferson" (CR 35), "Von der Mitte zu den Rändern / From the Center to Both Sides" (CR 36) and "Was sich beschreiben läßt, das kann auch geschehen / What Can Be Described Can Happen, Too" (CR 37).

A first cooperation with students takes place in 1972 with the performance "Ausstellung von 8 Personen, wohnhaft in der Rue Mouffetard in Paris, mittels ihrer Namen, auf den Mauern ihrer eigenen Straße / Exhibition of 8 People Living in Rue Mouffetard, Paris, by Way of Their Names on the Walls of Their Street" (CR 30). The year 1972 has even greater importance for the artistic work of Jochen Gerz in other regards.

Installations as a catalyst for remembrance and reflection

By chance Gerz 1972 travels to Dachau in the North of Munich. On the terrain of the former concentration camp, he photographs signs that restrict and instruct the visitor to this recently established memorial. The language of this museum is a shock. His and his camera's experience is more than any reality-performance documented so far. His perception calls for a new way of processing. Gerz finds it in the medium of installation.

His first large space installation entitled "EXIT, Materialien zum Dachau Project / EXIT, Materials for the Dachau Project" (CR 38) is an analysis of remembrance. The photos of Dachau are transformed into an edition. Twenty editions are placed on rough tables in the installation. Visitors are invited to sit on chairs in front of the tables and study the edition. The only light is provided by bare and dim light bulbs. The sounds of breathing, running and the machinegun clatter of two electric typewriters intensify this queasy atmosphere.

Once realized, the installation is discussed politically explosive and controversial. By

pointing out similarities between the language of lies and the holocaust in the former concentration camp and the language of the memorial established in its place in the sixties, Gerz creates the conditions for a confrontation with the Shoah unknown until now and for the first time he poses the question of an always renewed personal responsibility at presence from an artist's point of view.

More installations are created in rapid succession in 1974 and 1975. Some of them are preceded by performances without an audience. They deal with the topics of remembrance, instruction, prohibition and rituals, as these topics occur in the museum business. Examples are "Der Gedenktag des 16. Juni 1974 findet heute statt / The Memorial Day for June 16, 1974 Takes Place the Same Day" (CR 39), "To Live" (CR 40), "Das Vergehen von Hören und Sehen / The Disappearance of Hearing and Seeing" (CR 41), "Pictures at an Exhibition" (CR 42) and the installation "Doch die schönsten Bilder sind die unsichtbaren / Yet the Most Beautiful Images are Invisible" (43).

In the latter installations, he uses photographic opaque. The dark red, water-soluble iron oxide is used to retouch photos. After a first experiment in the picture diary "The French Wall" (Catalogue Raisonné, Volume III), photographic opaque would become the only paint used by Gerz. It would accompany his future work as a metaphor of time coagulated to a picture.

In the mid-seventies, artistic recognition begins to reward several exhibits. This does not eliminate Gerz' doubts of art and his own cultural identity but increases them. The installations "Objects are Withdrawing from me More and More" (CR 44), "The Self-Portrait" (CR 45) and "A Danish Exorcism" (CR 50) reflect these doubts. The role of art, the artist, the art business and the viewer are again debated. The debate finds its expression in autobiographic texts that are part of the exhibited work. These musings are the beginning of new, embracing and self-distanced artistic strategies. Gerz derives his impulses from Greek mythology.

Greek Pieces # 1 to 10

The alternation of success and failure, victory and defeat, personal feelings of love and separation, the examination of the victim and perpetrator-constellation and, finally, life and death are the topics which Gerz seeks to access in his Greek Pieces, realized between 1975 and 1978 and provided by moments of irony and satire, self-distance and self-accusation as well as by a growing self-consciousness of the own "white" identity in a post-colonial occidental culture.

Greek heroes and heroines with their archetypal actions, their cunning and their tragic destinies transmit this experience of time. There is the Orpheus' and Euridyke's mutual need for affirmation in "Ich komme gleich zurück (Euridyke) / I am Immediately Back (Euridyke)" (CR 46). There is "Outis" (CR 47), the nomadic anti-hero, the restless Ulysses of whom it remains uncertain whether he is the actor or the victim of his adventures before he returns to Penelope, the "Greek Widow" (CR 56). With his cunning he sees through all, but finally he loses all his power. There is "Prometheus" (CR 48) who attacks his own picture. Then there is the satyr "Marsyas" (CR 52) who mobilises the solidarity with human ugliness against the dangerous beauty of apollinic perfection. There is also Perseus, who in the installation "Kopf der M. / The Head of M." (CR 54) – medusa? media? – helps to discover the hidden identity of the self in the enemy at the opposite side.

Most of the Greek Pieces are installations. Often they are preceded by performances in which Gerz takes the role of the – victoriously? failing? – protagonist. Later, these performances appear as video recordings in the installations. They establish an ironic connecting context between ancient mythology and the here and now. They deal with the relationship between image and reproduction, reality and fiction, the assigning of

roles as well as the puzzling games of the art business. Thereby, the Greek pieces turn into a passage and journeys that initiate. They express a growing awareness of time.

Of central importance is the installation titled "Die Schwierigkeit des Zentaurs beim vom Pferd steigen / The Centaur's Difficulty When Dismounting the Horse" (CR 51), Gerz realized for the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennial in 1976. The centaur represents cultural nature which tries to deny its compulsive identity. The painful experience of an aging civilization is placed next to the inescapable decline of the own existence as an artist.

The performance/installation "Nacht, lass den Jäger schlafen / Night, Let the Hunter Sleep" (CR 49) and the two performances "Snake hoods and dragon dreams" (CR 55) and "Der Saal des Grabreliefs mit dem Jäger / The Room of the Tombal Relief with the Hunter" (CR 57) takes the subject further. They take on the hunter/victim syndrome and exhibit (bring to view) a growing awareness of the inadequacy and brittleness inherent in the equation of artist = hunter = man. From this vantage point, a bridge is built to present day and the myths of contemporary culture.

Kulchur Pieces # 1 to 9

Ezra Pound already about 1912 introduced the term of Kulchur as a term of ironic convenience referring to globalistic Western culture. Gerz adopts this term in the subtitles of 9 Installations of the years 1979 to 1984. These installations are concerned once more with the relationship art – artist – viewer.

By choosing integrated means of presentation, Gerz avoids definite statements and messages and constantly refers the viewer back to his own experiences and imaginations. In all this, the riddle plays its special role of encoding information. There are allusions to Duchamp and his questioning of the system of art in "Die Schönheit der Netzhaut / The Beauty of the Retina' (CR 61). "The Real Window to the World" (CR 62) points out the altered image perception in an era of new media. "Das Lächeln Mona L.'s bleibt unerwidert / The Smile of Mona L. Remains Unanswered" (CR 63) and "The Depot" (CR 64) is concerned with the unrestrained industrial will (fury?) to creation and production. Museum rooms increasingly start to obstruct this will to creation by walls and tunnel constructions, as for example in "Come on over to the dark side" (CR 65), "The end of the tunnel" (CR 75) and "Donna mi prega" (CR 81). Nature's chaos defeats the human efforts to structure reality in "Le beau contrôle / The Beautiful Control" (CR 83), and the visitor turns into Gulliver who discovers a new time dimension in "Freizeit – die neue Zeit ist von der Zeit befreit, Bilder der Erinnerung / Free time - the New Time is Freed from Time, Pictures of Memory" (CR 85).

Installations and Performances 1977 to 1985

Since the mid-seventies, time is a universal subject appearing in further installations. The "Transsib.-Prospekt" (CR 55) is a time journey from Moscow to Siberia and back realized for documenta VI. "The Stone Wants to Return to the Slingshot" (CR 59) is the metaphor for the irreconcilable separation between existence and remembrance, adult life and childhood. "Only a Single (Beloved) Rose?" (CR 72) accompanies the time of an exhibition in withering beauty. The installations "The Smoking" (CR 60) and "Das alte Mädchen / The Old Girl" (CR 80) are assessments of and homages to the faithful companion of many years and in many projects, the camera. "L'exposition / The Exhibition" (CR 84) is an installation designed as observer station of the self – where is the position of the artist, the art, the museum, the art critique and the viewer in a time when everything can be questioned except death?

Varied questions about the artist, the art business and the viewer are the subject of

performances titled "The painting mouth" (CR 58), "Couples" (CR 66), "Peinture dans la nuit / Painting in the Night" (CR 67), "Purple cross for absent now" (CR 68), "Nice to meet you" (CR 69) and "ABC of reading" (CR 70). The Performances "English letter to Jane" (CR 71), "Welcome home" (CR 73), "We are coming" (CR 74), "Die Reise / The Voyage" (CR 77), "Pioneers" (CR 82) and "Chinook" (CR 87) of the years 1979 to 1985 are increasingly concerned with autobiographic topics. They all are accompanied by long audio texts. These are about separation and loss, about conversation with the father, the mother's death, about the coexistence of life within and outside the art business, about intellectual weariness, and a new perspective of nature. In 1985, these topics are concluded as part of performances, to be continued later in Gerz' works in public space.

A new positioning of remembrance in public space

One year later, in 1986 – Jochen Gerz is now married with Esther Shalev-Gerz – the "Memorial against Fascism" (89) is inaugurated in Hamburg-Harburg. In 1984, the couple had won the competition to the project. Their drafts express a fundamentally different attitude to the prevailing culture of remembrance. Consistently the Hamburg-Harburg memorial refuses participation in any artistic substitute action. Instead, it turns its task back to the public. Passers-by are requested to sign their names onto the lead coat of a column, that is 12 meters high and is lowered step by step into the ground. "In the long run, nothing can stand up against injustice in our place" says the accompanying text.

New to remembrance is an active attitude focused on the present, in this and other projects that are controversial for years. New is also the explicit confession of a dialogue with the public, requiring sharper outlines to the strategies of questioning, disappearance and the waking of time awareness. This dialogue becomes the main characteristic of all future memorial-projects – the realized ones as well as the failed ones.

Thus in 1990, Gerz founds a project himself for a memorial, to be realized by himself and his students in Saarbrücken: "2146 Steine – Mahnmahl gegen den Rassismus / 2146 Stones – Monument Against Racism" (CR 105). The concept of the memorial is based on a dialogue with all Jewish communities in Germany. The names of the total 2146 Jewish cemeteries in Germany are engraved on the invisible underside of an equal number of paving stones of the Saarbrücken Castle-Square. The project is illegal, is realized without knowledge of the public and is not approved by parliamentary vote until after work has commenced. The Castle-Square is named "Square of the Invisible Monument".

In 1993, the French Ministry of Cultural Affairs invites the German artist to renovate the dilapidated memorial for the dead of the two World Wars in Biron, a village in the Dordogne. Gerz decides to have the memorial reconstructed in its original version. He adds plaques made of emaille that carry the answers of all adult villagers to an unpublished question. The memorial titled "Le Monument vivant de Biron / The Living Monument of Biron" (CR 120) is inaugurated in 1996. With this project, Gerz includes for the first time a text from someone else in his own work and thus entrusts the search for truth to a dialogue.

A suggestion by Jochen Gerz and Ester Shalev-Gerz to build a memorial in the Steiermark, dedicated to civilians shot in the military camp of Feliferhof between 1941 and 1945 is recommended by the vote of the competition jury (including military). The controversial project titled "Die Gänse vom Feliferhof / The Feliferhof Geese" (CR 125), is not realized until now due to resistance put up by Austrian conservative forces.

The conviction, that a central German Memorial for the murdered European Jews

should only be realized as a result of a common testifying process which includes the artist as well as the visitors and will take long time forms the basis of Gerz' proposal for the Berlin project "Warum ist es geschehen? Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas / Why Did it Happen? Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe" (CR 127). In his explanation to the competition jury, Gerz says: "I am not suggesting a traditional piece of art. I also ask you to leave all rules for esthetic experience behind. Let yourselves be involved in an experience that has received little emphasis by the arts: time. My work does not offer a visual explanation of the Shoah. It cannot be represented as such. A scandal remains scandalous. Describing it would only lessen it. Our actions are the subject of this memorial." The proposal did not materialize.

Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz produce a remembrance of the holocaust in 1998 in Berlin without public commission. Together with the "Berliner Ensemble", the "Hebbel Theater" the "Volksbühne am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz", three established theater ensembles in Berlin, and in cooperation with various newspapers, broadcast and TV stations, they put on stage "Die Berliner Ermittlung, nach einem Oratorium von Peter Weiß / The Berlin Investigation, on an Oratorium by Peter Weiß" (CR 128). During the performance, members of the audience read the text of "Die Ermittlung". The Installation "EXIT – Materials of the Dachau Project" of 1974 is exhibited on the stage.

In the same year, Gerz finds new authors for the common search for truth in the village Cahors in Southern France. Before the rendition of judgement of the former collaborator Maurice Papon, he interviews older village women on her truth (the relationship between personal, private and public-political truth). The answers of "Les témoins de Cahors / The Witnesses of Cahors" (CR 129) are published on billboards, in newspapers and in publications.

Billboards in Public Space

Gerz uses the medium of billboards since 1982. They carry messages and riddles, which seem to sabotage image-consuming, but address a total unprepared public as any large-size photo, colored scan, LED display or luminous display box in the city. The link between these pieces and the first group of performances of the late sixties is undeniable. Examples of public billboards are "There is no Mystery: Your Knowledge Will Kill You" (CR 79), "5 Billboards for Banff" (CR 86), "Der goldene Schnitt in Essen / The Golden Section in Essen" (CR 90), "Der Grazer Anschluss – Heute ist Gestern / The Grazer Annexation - Today is Yesterday" (CR 93), the LED version of the installation "Pictures at an Exhibition" (CR 96), "Immobilité / Immobility" (CR 97), "The New Derision" (CR 98), "Uwolnic Stalina, Uwolnic Coca Cola / Free Stalin, Free Coca Cola" (CR 99), "How can you live" (CR 102), "Free" (CR 103), "People speak" (CR 119) and finally, as his latest interactive project in 1999: "Künstler's Traum: Goethe in Buchenwald / Artist's Dream - Goethe in Buchenwald" (CR 131).

Installations 1986 to 1995

Compared to billboards, the installations in the late eighties and early nineties are less provocative and more contemplative and poetic. In his dialogue on the search of the (which?) truth Gerz concerns himself with historical and political, but also with personal and private, even retrospective subjects. He enters a dialogue with Ford Maddox Brown, Marcel Duchamp and Walter Benjamin and realizes a homage to Robert Smithson but as well returns to Ezra Pound.

Examples of related indoor and outdoor installations are: "La chasse / The Strip" (CR 88), "She/It" (CR 91), "Das letzte Bild / The Last Image" (CR 92), "Le retour des plombiers / The Return of the Plumbers" (CR 94), "Dreizehn Bilder / Thirteen Pictures" (CR 95), "Das Pult / The Lectern" (CR 100), "Speaking of her" (CR 104), "Der Eintrag / The

Entry" (CR 106), "A sense of attention" (CR 107), "Selfportrait" (CR 109), "OK KO" (CR 111), "Convertir / Convert" (CR 113), "News to News, Ashes to Ashes" (CR 114), "Le monument à la paix / The Piece Monument" (CR 115), "Der Lärm der Stiefel, die Stille der Pantoffeln / The Noise of the Boots, the Silence of the Slippers" (CR 116), "Die Verteilung der Saat/Die Kollekte der Asche / The Dispersal of Seeds/The Collection of Ashes" (CR 118), "Die Heimkehr der Erinnerung / Fragen an Walter Benjamin / The Return of Memory / Questions for Walter Benjamin" (CR 122), "The Empty Plinth" (CR 124) as well as "Miami Islet" (CR 131).

The search for truth in dialogue

Works in public space are the preferred medium in the nineties. In these works – together with and in parallel to the thought of remembrance – the search for truth in the dialogue with people develops into the leitmotiv and principle of Gerz' work.

The start of this dialogue is marked by "Die Bremer Befragung - Sine Somno Nihil / The Bremen Questionnaire- Sine Somno Nihil" (CR 112) that begins in 1990 and about the same time in the work "The Garden Project Donation" (CR 101). With the question "If art had the power to change your time, what would you ask for?", Gerz realizes his first internet project "The Plural Sculpture" in 1995. Further interactive projects are "Hierophanie #1" (CR 108) and "Hierophanie # 2" (CR 119). In the work "Das 20. Jahrhundert / The Twentieth Century" (CR 121) Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz ask the readers of newspapers in the Ruhr Territory: "If the twentieth century would take place again, what would you change?". In "Reasons for Smiles" (CR 123), the artist couple invites people throughout the world to send in undeveloped pictures of their smiles. "The Berkeley Oracle. Questions Unanswered" (CR 126) returns – in analogy to the Delphi Oracle – the unanswered (unanswerable?) questions and assigns to it the actual task of a search for truth. "Das Geld, die Liebe, der Tod, die Freiheit – was zählt am Ende? / Money, Love, Death, Freedom – What Counts at the End?" (CR 132) is itself a question that could have been asked by the Delphi oracle at the end of the twentieth century.

Art as a question of spiritual quality

The work of Jochen Gerz, introduced by the categories of performance, installation and art in public space, in spite or because of their constantly inherent doubts, is rooted in the belief that art is intellectual capacity. It is also rooted in trusting people's ability to develop this capacity in self-responsibility and to collaborate in realizing an art with the utopic idea of only authors and not viewers. The force of conviction and its radical and ever provocative transformation into artistic ideas and concepts on both sides of the Atlantic contributes most importantly to the uniqueness and the avant-garde character of Gerz' work which is not being denied since 30 years.

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Full Bibliography in jochengerz.eu/info/bibliography:

Ia Artist books, **Ib** Catalogues of solo exhibitions, **Ic** Catalogues of group exhibitions, **Id** Catalogue Raisonné, **Ie** Monographs, **II** Articles in periodicals, **III** Written interviews with Jochen Gerz, **IV** Audio- and Video Recordings, **V** Texts on Jochen Gerz, **VI** Texts by Jochen Gerz