

Jochen Gerz

Catalogue Raisonné

Introduction by Renate Petzinger and Volker Rattemeyer (Museum Wiesbaden and Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg 2000)

Volume I / **Volume II** / Volume III / Volume IV

"I am simultaneously dreaming image and text"

The common theme of the works contained in Volume II of this catalogue raisonné is the dialectic of image and word. What is it about the relationship between these two unequal siblings which Jochen Gerz himself once described as 'Quislings'? Is it heteronomy or arbitrariness, mutual subjugation or independence?

The starting point is Visual Poetry. Around 1967 photography and text are still united like two children in playful interaction. This is followed by the years of "growing up" with an almost systematic separation which, from 1973, is visually reflected in the conspicuous forward slash of the series title "Photo/Text". The second series title "Mixed Media Photography" from 1980 onwards signals possibilities of new combinations. Today, at the threshold to the 21st century, picture and text are united in the high-performance computer. The era of mixed media photography is coming to an end, the juxtaposition of photography and text is entering a phase as new as the themes with which Gerz concerns himself when he combines both media: the split between art and life, the awareness of fugitiveness, the dialogue about truth.

Paul M. and Photo/Text

Two precursors of the series which Gerz himself programmatically refers to as Photo/Text are produced in 1969 and 1970. These are the two works "Paul M." and "Photo/Text", in which photography and text are for the first time programmatically combined as a rigorously constructed unit of separateness.

"Paul M." – meant is the author – brings back photos from a journey, without ever being able to recollect having taken them. A meticulous detective-like search for the origin of the photos – 10 blurred aerial photographs – proves fruitless. "Photo/Text" shows two air-takes of cloud formations. The text quotes the pictures to be evidence of the fictive claim that India has re-accessed the United States from Castile.

The absurdity of both tales that clearly appear dadaistic is evident. With nightmare-like assiduity, a man tries to prove to himself he could never have taken certain photos. What sort of thought trap is harboured in the description of this senseless search for reality? The photos of a transitory cloud formation give reason to set up a play of thought on the subject of colonisation and decolonisation. What kind of subversive strength lies in the almost unnerving gentleness of this invention? Both works address the securing of evidence, the play of memory, the reality and fiction of pictures, the doubting of their essence as evidence and the anonymous obsessions bound up when viewing them. The repetitive principle is significant to the structure of the series.

At the time these works were created, Gerz – who had not been living in Paris long – was on the way to seeing himself not only as author, but as artist as well. He expresses fundamental, epistemological prejudice towards the reality of art, towards our view of the world and our everyday reality.

Parallel to the first photo/text works, these prejudices are also visible in performances and in the commentaries and observations of his visual diary "The French Wall" (1968 - 1975).

Photo/Texts 1973 - 1975: The rituals of reality and fiction

In 1972, Gerz moves with his first wife Véronique von Büren and their son Francis and with friends from the play-groups of Censier and Jussieu from the Parisian metropolis into rural Prément on the outskirts of the Champagne country. They set up the "Society for the Practical Study of Daily Life", a pedagogical project derived from the idea of Rousseau's novel "Emile". Against this background, children are to be allowed to unfold themselves. From the experiment, the adults hope to acquire new respect for day-to-day reality.

Most of the work for "The French Wall" is created in Prément. Parallel to this, in 1973, Gerz commences work on a series of 132 Photo/Texts in which he systematically seeks an artistic form for the binding of image and word. As Helmut Heissenbüttel writes in the postface to "Die Zeit der Beschreibung", the photo in itself is merely a document and, as such, a "partial mummy", were it not for the text, which, in conjunction with the photo, brings across the feel of something that has been vitally alive.

What are the themes of the first Photo/Texts? Taking a look, one sees an open diary, landscapes and parks, city squares and streets, the interiors of homes and public premises, a child, an ice skater, trains and stations, cars and people. They are everyday pictures, commonplace, without any claim to being special, unique or even sensational. The photos were taken for the most part in Prément and recount nothing else than what could have happened, time and again, here or there, day for day, summer and winter. The photos are blurred and out of focus, the takes are incidental, shot as if by chance and without intent.

All the texts belonging to the photos are written by Gerz himself. Neither do they explain the photos, nor do they constitute any thematic supplement. Instead they tend to underline the nature of the indiscernibility of what is familiar, the indistinctness of the images, sometimes even the unendurable nature of an existence that remains unreal, the reality of which cannot be documented anyway in the photo and to which distance is construed. The literary style used in the third person adds to the impact of each text: "He sat ...", "He remembered...", "He went ...", "He felt ..." etc. There is no mention as to whether or not the author means himself when writing in the third person.

As Gunter Gebauer says in his essay, written in 1975 on the exhibition held in Karlsruhe, the first sentences of these texts give the impression of fragments from a novel, taking apparent account of the viewer's specific reading habits. Yet once aroused, the impression of biographic fiction is swiftly countered, the reader thrown back onto his own reflections by way of paradoxes, conjunctives and shifts in the viewing level. The reader is left to sort out his own perceptions for himself.

During the years 1973 to 1975, the outer form of the Photo/Texts takes on two different contours. Some – such as the works of "The French Wall" series – are presented in flat, generally oblong-sized wooden boxes, in which one to two – and later even more – photos are mounted. The text appears below, once handwritten and once typewritten. This is followed by a stamp with the words "gelebt" (lived) and "nicht gelebt" (not lived), each attribute preceded by a circle to one of them the viewer could place a cross. A second line bears the name of the author. Likewise entered by hand are the date of the work and the signature.

Other Photo/Texts from the same period take on the visual form of documentation of a performance-like production process, which ritually doubles up on the question of

reality and fiction of the medium of photography. To start with, the photos, texts and authenticity stamp of the documentary evidence are mounted in upright wooden boxes, 8 cm in depth. With these contents, the boxes are returned to the location of the "stolen" photographic take and a second photo is born, showing the realized work in situ. This second photo becomes part of a dossier that is allocated to the lower part of the wooden box. The dossier is open. On the left, it shows the second photo and alongside it, to the right, a double stamp with the text "rapporté à" (next to the top stamp is the handwritten name of the location, next to the lower stamp the handwritten reference "l'art en tant que reference"). Under each is "le" with the handwritten date, identical top and bottom. A meticulously managed twofold return of photographic reality to everyday reality and to the reality of art.

Another ritual heightening of the issue of reality and fiction, in conjunction with the factor of time, is provided by the black/white photos being covered over with paint. The dark red, water-soluble ferrous oxide, otherwise used for retouching, has long been the only colour used by Gerz. Since "The French Wall", it has become a metaphor for the time that has passed in creating a work. In the Photo/Texts, this colour is first seen with Photo/Text #18 "Erst ganz den Blicken entzogen" (no 152), together with a text that makes reference to the factor of time involved in memory. Other Photo/Texts in which paint plays a role are "Die Ansicht der Dokumente" (no 155), "The Object" (no 180), "Am letzten Tag ..." (no 182), "Die Bilder waren gelungen" (no 183), "Das andere Bild" (no 184) and "Sie nannten sie ..." (no 187).

However, documenting what cannot be documented in the early Photo/Texts proceeds yet a step further. Gerz publishes the Photo/Texts under the ambiguous title of "Die Zeit der Beschreibung" (The Time of Description) as book as well. Initially only one book is planned, yet the "second", "third" and "fourth" book follow, each with a post-face written by Helmut Heissenbüttel.

Photo/Texts 1975 - 1984: Confessing to the autobiographical

Since 1975, changes have become perceptible in the photos and texts. As Gerz pointed out in 1978 during an interview with Claire Gravel, there is still no ambitious photo: "no view which is final and would be better than another, there is no ultimately determinant photo, since it dissipates into the many other images surrounding it". The views show motives from Paris, from the countryside and from an ever-increasing number of journeys. At the same time, they become noticeably more forceful in expression and relate increasingly to the text. Both content and focus become tangibly more marked. No longer are the texts – still recounted in the third person – aimed at the dead-end road of biographic fiction. They become more direct, more autobiographic. They reflect both the process of photography and that of viewing. Added to this comes the motive of travel, which in 1976 and 1977 is a way of experiencing time and reality – a theme which has accompanied Gerz metaphorically in his installations. Examples for Photo/Texts on the subject of travel are the works created in Venice, "The Golden Odyssey" (no 198) and "From his place ..." (no 201), "He had gotten on in P. ..." (no 211), "... the never ending country ..." (no 215) or indeed "They had been travelling for days ..." (no 221). Since 1978, the texts can be read as coded messages, centred on personal, biographic change. The separation from the first wife, the death of his mother, the personal success in the world of art with all the doubts this involves, the striking up of new relationships and a fundamental new view of nature. The latter is above all nurtured by personal experiences when travelling the Canadian western coast, on the Pacific Islands to the north of Vancouver. Again there are thematic parallels to the installations and performances created at the same time.

The visual structure of the Photo/Texts alters too. Linking up with the two early works "Paul M" and "Photo/Text", the black/white photos are no longer mounted in wood, but are given their own quick-change picture frames – or more precisely, glass picture

clamps sized 13.5 x 18.5 cm, which in today's world of colour and holiday photography, can be obtained en masse from any department store. The typewritten texts too are framed in such glass clamps. The handwritten texts are now written left-right-reversed and positioned with stamp, date and signature, so as to be invisible beneath the typewritten text in the same frame. Photos and texts are mounted according to a precise plan, as installation on the wall.

Mixed Media Photographs 1980 - 1981: Le Grand Amour I and II

The year 1980 marks the commencement of work in a new category, that of Mixed Media Photographs. The first two Mixed Media Photographs bear autobiographic traits in much the same way as the earlier Photo/Texts. "Le Grand Amour # 1" can be interpreted as the depiction of the love affairs since the separation from the first wife and "Le Grand Amour # 2" recounts the story familiar to every man in taking leave of his first great love, that of his mother. For the first time ever, Gerz makes use of the literary first person to tell his tale. And for the first time, the motives of both works show features unknown up to now with Gerz: portraits, 12 shots of young, attractive women and 12 of a dignified old lady in the throes of death.

Mixed Media Photographs 1981 - 1986: new aesthetics in photograph and text

Between 1980 and 1986, in the wake of the two works addressing the subject of "grand amour", a whole bundle of work follows, each of 7 cycles, each made up of 3 to 8 single works and 30 other Mixed Media Photographs.

Noticeably new and unusual for Gerz is his acknowledgement of imagery aesthetics. The motives are carefully selected and have been just as carefully taken. The shots are still quiet and peaceful, without dramatic element, mostly landscape formations from North America: lakes and rivers, stone and mountain formations, trees and forests, birds and sky. The photos have mostly been taken on the small Canadian island where Gerz often returns since 1980. Other motives are portraits of himself and his second wife, Esther Shalev-Gerz.

The copies are enlarged to 40 x 50 cm, set in black and white metal quick-change frames that are easily obtainable anywhere. Some work involves small copies sized 13 x 18 cm, no longer in glass picture frames, but in suitably sized metal frames. The texts that Gerz still writes himself relate to art, travel, time and personal relationships. Overlapping with the creation of the Kulchur Pieces, ever greater attention is now paid to the tales from the cultural circle of the Canadian Indians, who still live on the islands by Vancouver and have held on to their "pre-historic" time almost into the twentieth century. This topic has culminated in an altered style of language of the author, softer, sometimes even chattering, greatly different from the taut, artificial language of the Photo/Texts.

Each text is first written on the typewriter and then either framed as original or enlarged photographically to 40 x 50 cm. Each installation on the wall is made up of at least one and up to 20 large photographs, sometimes just as many small ones, as well as one to two text panels. Some motives are added or repeat themselves, sometimes are displayed shown the other way round, all making a total composition, the arrangement of which, planned down to the last detail, produces a tense and at the same time relaxed contrast to the calm aesthetics of an individual picture. The texts relate in a variety of ways to the pictures, sometimes appearing as integral unit, sometimes effecting a communal casualness among these "unlike siblings" and their task of informing and riddle.

In 1986, the cycle "Blue (Yellow, Red, Green) or Real Life # 1 - 8" appeared, quite distinctive from the previous Mixed Media Photographs. In addition to the black/white pictures, each individual work from this eight-part cycle displays an oblong monochrome colour panel, produced chemically in the laboratory, in blue, yellow, red and green. This is a form of colour sampler that gives the viewer the opportunity to position the black/white picture more precisely in its variability to reality. This colour sampler, half the size of the photos, forms a sort of pedestal or foot, upon which the black/white photographs with their imagery of driftwood are displayed, much in the same way as a totem pole. The texts of the 8 installations of this cycle relate to a time period that "recurs every twelve years".

Mixed Media Photographs 1987 - 1992: collages of image and text

Since 1987 a new relationship has evolved in Mixed Media Photographs between the unlike siblings of image and text. The photographs are no longer solely taken in the nature but also during travel to other countries (Japan or Israel, for example), as well as in the large cities. Increasing attention is now given to human face and body, fragmented beyond recognition. Images are superimposed and blended in, and reality and fiction intermingle.

The recounting nature of the texts is reduced. In its place are short and poetic phrases, dadaistic snippets of words, slogans, logos and symbols, fragments of proverbs, words that are invented or combinations of words that are surprising and trigger off associations (such as GERM/GIFT). There are coded commentaries and reflections on the relationship of art and nature, art and life, world events and banality, printed in English, but as well in babylonian multilinguality.

In visual terms, the texts now appear in large capital letters, no longer with their own text panel but as collage, integrated into the framed photograph. These collages are generated at the outset by way of multiple photographs and enlarged typewritten lettering and since 1988, have mostly been in the form of moulded vinyl lettering, punched out of red, white or black self-adhesive vinyl foil.

The red vinyl foil calls to mind the paint used by Gerz in other work since the beginning of the seventies. Symbolically, the use of this colour triggers off a new relationship between text and image. The red vinyl text "deletes" a part of the photo and by way of its message, however, has a reinforcing effect on the remaining part.

The eight-part cycle ERASE/THE PAST created in 1990 is a comment on German unification. Gerz took the photos in the western and eastern parts of his city of birth, Berlin. Directly next to the wall stands a raised frame, the lookout point of border soldiers (west or east?) with the lettering ERASE. A view of a flat landscape (from the west or east?) with the words THE PAST. The photo with the standing frame becomes smaller and smaller as the eight parts of the cycle develop and that of the landscape, tiny at the outset, grows to fill the entire picture frame at the end. How is the past to be manipulated? Who erases whom?

Mixed Media Photographs 1992 - 1995: The Impending Change of Time and Viewer Participation

In the cycle "I HAD A DREAM # 1 - 9" of 1992 Gerz shows unfocused photographs of nature, trees and surfaces of water. He uses sandblasted glass for framing the accompanying texts. The milky gelatinous character of the texts interacts with the dissolving character of the photographs. The text refers to the impending turn of the millennium and the opaqueness of the transient existence between past and future. Similarly, the cycle, "AT.THE.END.OF.THE.CENTURY # 1 - 6" of 1993, as well as other mixed media

photographs of this time take as their theme the reflection on the past and expectations of the future in an awareness of impending change of time.

In addition, Gerz introduces viewer participation into his mixed media photography – a central feature of his projects in public space. Examples of such participation are "THE ANSWER", "WHAT YOU BUY" and "ON BUYING" – with texts which are no longer scripted only by Gerz as the author but by students or visitors to the exhibitions.

It is in the work "CAREFREE DEVELOPMENTS", that his own handwriting, left-right-reversed, reappears like a distant memory of the infinite manuscripts of the Venice Biennial installation "The difficulty of the centaur when dismounting the horse", also in mirror writing, a reflection on being a stranger or being "the other" in the age of globalisation, - what has changed in our understanding of culture in the years since then?

Mixed Media Photographs: White Ghost, 1998

The series of mixed media photographs announces its own end by theme and by medium in the mid-90s. The cycle "White Ghost # 1-9" of 1998 can be regarded as the last work of the series and, at the same time, as a prelude to a changed new beginning – the direction of which is as yet unknown.

The cycle features 9 portraits of people in the natural surroundings of the Canadian group of islands. Each portrait consists of two parts: the left half shows a nude, the right half shows a statement in white lettering on a red background which seems to refer to an unknown question. The cycle resembles in character the series "Les témoins de Cahors" which was realized as a work in public space at the same time. Even the technique is identical. They are computer printouts on which picture and text are both generated as digital reproductions. The 9 white figures are standing like archaic sculptures in the north American wilderness, their statements are a discussion of the own identity.

The pages have been opened on a new chapter on simultaneity of images and words – a simultaneity which could end up in a loss.

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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