

Jochen Gerz

Catalogue Raisonné

Introduction by Renate Petzinger and Volker Rattemeyer (Museum Wiesbaden and Verlag für moderne Kunst Nürnberg 2011)

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

Words and images, thought and action, irony and enigma

Ten years have passed since publication of the first two volumes of the catalogue raisonne of Jochen Gerz' oeuvre. According to the original plans, the third and last volume was to be released soon thereafter, so that Gerz' works from the period 1967 – 2000 would be fully accessible to the public as soon as possible. For many reasons, those plans could not be carried out. Gerz has since realized a number of major participative works in public space ("Public Authorship") – hence, the decision to add a fourth volume to the series. Following the survey of 413 works from the many thematic groups "Visual Poetry", "French Wall", single works, "Fuji-Yama-Series", manuscripts (mirror writing), video works and editions from 1963 to 2010, the fourth volume will devote a separate chapter to "Public Authorship" and works in public space, supplemented by biographical notes and a bibliography.

The inclusion of "Public Authorship" sharpens the retrospective focus on Gerz' early work and the questions and positions it embodies, which – the progressions and changes of the intervening years notwithstanding – have remained essential constants in the work of the artist over the years.

Visual Poetry

Gerz arrived in Paris in 1966. From 1967 to 1972, he completed a number of photo-text collages that can be classified as Visual Poetry. With subtle, often Dada-style irony, he explored the relationship between words and images, turning meanings to their opposites, exposing the Janus-headed character of the media and examining the relationships between thought and action as well as the then prevalent critical attitudes toward bourgeois society.

The photo-collage entitled "Word, no Word" from 1967 (CR 470) and the text "word, please no word", which appears in endless repetition, read like a final farewell to literature. Gerz, the former student of German philology and ancient history who first referred to himself as a writer in 1963, had grown increasingly suspicious of literature. He felt that it was not flexible enough to permit imagination of the multi-faceted changes, cunning critical queries and interactions between the real and its presentation in the media, between artistic and everyday reality that were the focus of his interest – an interest that remained coupled with constructive scepticism, although his doubts now applied to art, to the goals, the business and the institutions of art and of course to his own existence as an artist.

In bidding farewell to literature, he did not abandon language, however. On the contrary, words and texts have remained essential components of the art of Jochen Gerz for nearly five decades.

The words "The Medium is the Message" appear in the text of a collage realized in 1968 (CR 486). The familiar sentence is altered through two subtle interventions: The double "S" in the word Message is replaced by the ominous runes associated with the Nazi SS

and serves as a reminder of the power of propaganda in service of a campaign to annihilate an entire people. Also printed in reverse, the double "S" is transformed into two dollar signs, the "e" becomes an "a" and the message appears as "Ma\$\$age", a reference to the world of possibilities and abuse opened up by money.

His distrust of the media is equalled by his desire for change through action. In 1968 Gerz hammered the phrase "Pour un langage du faire" into the keys of his IBM electric (golfball) typewriter (CR 489). And in 1972 he closed the chapter devoted to Visual Poetry with the photograph of an inscription hewn in stone: "Res, non verba" (CR 514) – Facts, not words.

Visual Poetry has been published in such international publications as Opus International, Robho, Visuelle Poesie, Wort und Wahrheit, Stereo Headphones, The San Francisco Earthquake, Experiments in Prose, Klepht, De Tafelronde, Amenophis, Uomini e Idee and Vou.

The book entitled "Annoncenteil" was published by Luchterhand in 1971. Several Visual Poetry works are presented there under the heading of "Static Texts", about which Gerz offers the following comments: "Static texts are visual, similar to concrete poetry, yet some of them go beyond the existing character set of the alphabet. They are concerned with the language of print, with the hangover left behind by the Gutenberg culture, with its abstract, impoverished signs and its left-to-right reading sequence. The action takes place on the surface of the paper". Examples include "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Bourgeois" (CR 496) and "The Tree of the Silent Majority" (CR 497), both of which reflect a critical approach to contemporary society.

The "Static Texts" are followed in the publication by "Progression Texts", to which Gerz assigns the following function: "Progression texts are away-from-paper texts, toward-squares-streets-buildings-people texts and back-to-paper texts. They nest in the book like parasites. They are not constituted on paper, but appear everywhere, anytime and in public. They have countless anonymous authorreaders. They do not endure for the time it takes to turn the page and read them to the end but only for the moment of perception in everyday life". Progression texts are parts of his first performances and works in public space, such as "Attention Art Corrupts" (CR 1), "The Book of Gestures" (CR 5), "Cards" (CR 11) and "The New Phonebook of Paris" (CR 14). An audience that was still anonymous at the time is invited by Gerz, who had come to refer to himself as "one who publishes himself", to reflect, to act and to answer. In the process of development from Visual Poetry to performance and art in public space, artist and audience enter into new relationships.

French Wall

Between 1968 and 1975, Gerz compiled a visual diary containing 88 works under the title of "French Wall". In this collection, handwritten, typewritten and stamped texts are supplemented by photographs and everyday objects, such as envelopes, plastic items, pieces of canvas, nails, blotting paper, silver foil, typewriter type key cleaner, a compass, a slate, broken sticks of chalk, hair, a hand stamp, an audio cassette, etc. Dark red ferrous oxide dissolved in water, once used in photo retouching, was used to obscure some items or as a writing and painting medium. The elements are mounted on cardboard under Plexiglas with black tape and placed in open wooden frames about five centimetres deep.

The term "French Wall" alludes to the traditional French method of picture-hanging (also known as Petersburg hanging), which Gerz repeats in the hanging of his diary excerpts containing notes on his thoughts about change and identification, his scepticism towards language and art, his concepts of society and culture and the relationship between art and everyday life. His own everyday environment shifted in

1972 for several years from Paris to the rural community of Prément, where Gerz founded the "Gesellschaft zum praktischen Studium des täglichen Lebens" (Society for practical studies of daily life) with his family and friends following his participation in the crèches sauvages (Summerhill-style kindergarden) of the Censier and Jussieu faculties in Paris (CR 529).

"Art is a dupery. Words are snares". Gerz wrote these words in longhand with opaque paint on one of the wooden frames (CR 538) and asked, "If I am the artist, who then are you?" (CR 559). At another point he wrote "Get out of my words" (CR 565), and shortly after his return to Paris he covered a piece of cardboard with opaque paint and added the following words beneath it: "Go, dear image, & leave far behind you the chains of visibility" (CR 577). The progression from literature to text as an element of visual art was accompanied by doubts about the media. These prompted such ironic statements as "L'art est inutile, ne sert à rien et n'aide personne – Art is useless, good for nothing, and helps no one" (CR 580) as well as references to the temptations of mimetic representation in "The joyful tits of mimesis" (CR 581). His inner distance to art and to an art business whose rituals Gerz mistrusted from the outset was manifested in those years in performances, installations and works in public space, which are listed in Volume I of this catalogue raisonne, among them the large installation entitled "EXIT, Materialien zum Dachau-Projekt" (CR 38). Despite these doubts, Gerz wrote the following appeal in his visual diary in 1975: "Komm, Kunst, lass uns noch etwas zusammenbleiben – Come art, let us stay a while together" (CR 594).

Early single works

Early single works were realized within the context of performances in the 1970s. In his previously cited "Annoncenteil", Gerz refers to the texts in this group of works as process texts. In the corresponding performances (CR 13, CR 15, CR 16, CR 18, CR 19, CR 20, CR 21 and CR 22) he relinquished the role of the artist to reality. He referred to the documentations of his performances as "Reconstructions that do not take place at the scene of the action. They compile traces, evidence (photos, paper, etc.) that make the process of reconstruction readable in the first place. Their function is to show what was in terms of space and time within a given intention, i.e. arrangement and the resulting conditions. They also represent a discourse on the possibility/impossibility of reconstruction – that is, of recording in writing."

The transformation of everyday reality into art – specifically in performance – and the documentation of this rededicated everyday reality in art works, is exemplified in "Pièce avec un aveugle" (CR 605), "Pièce pour 1, 2, 3, 4" (CR 606), "La ligne de démarcation" (CR 607), "La défoliation" (CR 608), "12 x La Santé" (CR 612), "Der Baum, die Wiedergabe" (CR 613), "Fotografieren, um fahren zu können" (CR 614) and "Giving Water" (CR 622).

Gerz found the performers and/or the settings for these actions and events on the streets or in parks. What happens is what would happen if he were not an observer of the events in question. A blind man crosses the street, garden workers flatten the soil in the Jardin des Plantes with their feet, sprinklers water its lawns, a windowwasher cleans the windows of the Museum of Natural History, a tree-lined avenue sheds its leaves, the square in front of La Santé prison and a nocturnal street scene are photographed for no apparent reason.

In other performances without an audience Gerz explored himself and the boundaries of his own body and documented his findings in such works as "To Warm the Earth" (CR 24, CR 615), "To Cry until Exhaustion" (CR 26, CR 616) and "Schreiben mit der Hand" (CR 32, CR 618). Assuming various different positions, he lies on a field and warms the earth; on the grounds of what later became the Charles de Gaulle Airport, he calls out at a distance of 60 metres from the camera and microphone until his voice gives out;

and he writes the following sentence with his naked fingers on the wall of a building until the letters appear as smears of blood: "These words are my flesh and my blood." The latter two pieces are documented on film.

Another single work is the product of a visit to the cemetery in a village in the Champagne region. Toward the end of his practical studies of daily life Gerz dedicates the series entitled "Die Bücher von Gandelu" to the cemetery. The inhabitants of this village do not write books about their history. Nor does anyone else write about them. The only books that bear their names are those made of marble, stone or plastic and placed on their graves, whose futile dignity is the subject of the work (CR 626). Before realizing the installation entitled "Der Transsib.-Prospekt" for the sixth documenta in Kassel in 1977, he did a study comprising 15 slates bearing mirror writing in chalk as a single work. They describe his preparations for the project and his thoughts on the events of this journey.

Fuji-Yama-Series

In 1979, Gerz visited the French Ruhr region, the coal-mining area between Lille and the Belgian border, which inspired the "Fuji-Yama- Series" consisting of twenty photographs of the destroyed industrial landscape in the north of France and its coal tips, which call to mind the perfectly auratic silhouette of Mount Fuji. The false Mount Fujis (40 x 50 cm) are accompanied by and combined with text panels (24 x 32 cm) bearing nonsensical couplets reminiscent of Irish limericks.

In the meantime, Gerz had exhibited "The Difficulty of the Centaur when Dismounting the Horse" in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 1976 and taken part at the 1977 documenta in Kassel, where he showed "The Transsib.-Prospekt".

In a series of "Greek Pieces" and five "Kulchur Pieces", he had focused on themes from Greek mythology and the traditions of a European – and hence white – culture. In the process he developed new strategies for articulating his doubts with respect to art, the role of the artist, the art market and especially to the passive role of the viewer. These new strategies included further elaborated ideas about art as a space for imagination as well as new formulas for the artistic devices of cunning and enigma, satire and irony, all of which he had employed in his Visual Poetry. The poetic lightness of the ironically enigmatic limericks in the Fuji-Yama-Series benefited from these developments.

Manuscripts (mirror writing)

His works for the Biennale and the documenta as well as several of his Greek Pieces and Kulchur Pieces were accompanied by notes recorded in mirror writing and drawings which at the same moment are part of the concept and of the development of these works. Referred to as "manuscripts", these works offer insights into Gerz' conceptual workshop only to those who take the time to decipher the texts written in mirror writing.

Gerz explained his decision to use this form in the manuscripts for the "Transsib.-Prospekt" (CR 655) in these words: "Left-to-right writing is the watchman: He acts in service of invisibility, not of those who wish to read it." To the extent possible, these texts have been transcribed and documented in this volume of the catalogue raisonné. An exception is the manuscript for "The Difficulty of the Centaur when Dismounting the Horse", which is so long that the Kunstraum Munchen devoted a separate publication to it, containing a bilingual reproduction of the entire text in 1976.

Video works

The Centre Pompidou in Paris and the museums in Strasbourg and Liechtenstein presented a retrospective exhibition of Gerz' video works in 2002. All of the surviving documents relating to his performances since 1969 were compiled on a DVD for the purposes of this retrospective and are now available as video documents – single and as an edition (CR 669 – CR 676, CR 678, CR 680, CR 682 – CR 689, CR 694 und CR 697).

The catalogue of videos also includes tapes recorded for the Greek Pieces "Der Kopf der M." and "The Greek Widow" as well as the tape entitled "The Real Window to The World", which was made for the Kulchur Piece of the same title (CR 677, CR 679 and CR 681). Six videos were produced as autonomous works during the 1980s. The texts contain reflections on changing gender behaviours ("In case we meet", CR 690, "Vidéo Opera", CR 691, "Nachher, nachher", CR 692, "Participation ...," CR 693, "Ti amo", CR 695) and attitudes toward nature ("Propos contenu a l'aube", CR 696).

Yet for an artist who is probably more at home in the world of the media than any other, Gerz has remained astonishingly restrained in his use of the medium of video. He regards video above all as a form of documentation, and this applies as well to several of the "Public Authorship" pieces realized since the year 2000 (CR 698, CR 700- 702).

The video film entitled "Die kleine Zeit" is also documentary in character. The recordings were made at the Berliner Akademie der Künste in the autumn of 1999. Gerz posed the following question to some 60 artistic colleagues and to the members of the Academy of arts: "Assuming that – as in every work of art – the aim of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe is to make the voices of the living audible, to articulate our own thoughts rather the occasions and anecdotes which prompt them, what would your voice say?" The film shows the faces of the participants during a short time of hesitation and silence (CR 699).

Late single works

Between 1987 and 1999 Gerz realized a group of single works which are closely related to the mixed-media photographs of the 1980s and 1990s. This group includes the "Free ..." series, in which the following appeals appear on five framed photo panels with a total height of 200 cm: "Free Ezra Pound", "Free Adam Smith", "Free Rosa Luxemburg", "Free Florence Nightingale", "Free Michael Bakunin", "Free Coca Cola" (CR 706 – CR 711). Exhibited frequently in the 1990s, this series expresses an invitation to reconsider the attributions and the positive and negative prejudices that are generally associated with these (and other) names.

It was followed by seven similar photo panels grouped under the title "Fresh Lesson" containing the comment "Aucun mur nepeut en cacher un autre – No wall can hide another wall" (CR 712).

In another group of works, Gerz combines pairs of different portrait photographs, half of each of which is covered with red vinyl, to create four double-faced portraits (CR 713 – CR 716).

Five other single works are closely related to the thematic complex of the mixed-media photographs of the 1990s. Looking ahead to the impending turn of the millennium, Gerz anticipates the question of what has changed 20th century culture with such commentaries as "The Pictures of the End are the Pictures of the Beginning" (CR 722).

Editions

The editions, which accompany the art of Jochen Gerz from the early 1960s to well into the new millennium focus like a magnifying glass on the conflicting aspects of change and continuity in his work as an artist.

The first edition, entitled "Nachmittagmond", was realized in 1963 and has its origins in his years as a writer (CR 724). Published in Badenweiler near Basel, where he was studying at the time, it contains nine poems by Gerz and ten prints of the painter Bernd Völkle.

A number of later editions relate to Visual Poetry, early performances and works in public space. They are published between 1968 and 1973, some of them as Mail art or as artists editions, mostly by Edition Agentzia, co-founded by Gerz, or by progressive art galleries. The edition entitled "Card Texts" (CR 739), for example, emerged from the public performance of the same title, in which Jochen Gerz distributed and mailed printed cards to people from the art scene as well as individuals found in the telephone book. "Art is a convention" they read or "Everything is a copy" or "Please think on". That same year, the edition entitled "J'ai beaucoup aimé ton expo chez Ben" was published. In a cardboard box, it assembled 12 printed items from the period, some communicating with an anonymous audience, others which had already been published as editions before (CR 745). Another edition, "Rechtsschreibung, ego. & cetera", was published by Udo Breger in Göttingen in 1971 (CR 749). Gathered together here are plays on words reflecting critical attitudes toward society and the media, such as "If you wish", "One word. Two words", "Pour un langage du faire", "Rechtsschreibung" and "The Medium is the Message". Armin Hundertmark republished 21 editions and documents from this period in "Postsachen" (CR 779).

Gerz also realized objects in his early years, often with subtly masked social criticism, including "La postérité commence maintenant" (CR 729), "Revolut ..." (CR 754) at Wolfgang Feelisch and "L'objet d'art ..." (CR 756 und CR 757).

The dialectic of image and word and questions about the nature of reality and fiction and about evidence and memory with which Gerz always associated that dialectic, are documented in the Photo/Texts in Volume II of the catalogue raisonné. They were first manifested in the editions of 1970 in the work entitled "F/T" and the following assertion, itself a Dada-style poke at recorded history: "During a brief stop in New York the passengers on a Boeing 747 were reported to have said that India had taken back the United States of America from Castille. Here is the evidence!" (CR 741).

During the ten years between 1974 and 1984, which witnessed the origins of major installations, the Greek Pieces and the Kulchur Pieces, Gerz produced only few editions. The nature of these works as catalysts for reflection on history, culture and change is consistently reflected in them. Examples include the editions "EXIT / Materialien zum Dachau-Projekt" (CR 783) as well as "La journée commémorative ..." (CR 784), "The Difficulty of the Centaur when Dismounting the Horse" (CR 787), "Pictures at an Exhibition" (CR 791) and "Nur eine einzige (geliebte) Rose?" (CR 799). The poetic irony of the Fuji-Yama-Series is also evident in the editions published in 1979 and 1980 (CR 793, CR 794, CR 797 and CR 798).

In the mid-1980s, Gerz returned to public space with a number of projects. The "Monument against Fascism" in Harburg, realized in collaboration with Esther Shalev-Gerz, is as resistant to the medium of the edition as "2146 Stones – Monument against Racism" in Saarbrücken or "Le monument vivant", the renewal of the monument of Biron. Thoughtfully designed publications are devoted to these and other memorial projects.

The messages and puzzles contained in provocative billboard projects in public space, such as "5 Billboards for Banff" (CR 802), "Immobilité" (CR 811) and "The New Derision" (CR 812), for which Gerz produced parallel editions in the late 1980s, are a different story.

The editions of the 1990s reflect above all on the themes and imagery of the Mixed Media Photographs on which Gerz was also working at the time (e.g. "Erase. The Past", CR 816, "Blue or Real Life", CR 818, "You Ask For", CR 827), and on older and more recent works in public space (e.g. "People Speak", CR 844, "Die Zeugen von Cahors", CR 850, and "Künstlers Traum", CR 851).

As part of his series "Signature", in 1993 Theo Rommerskirchen produced a labyrinthic text entitled "Über die Vergangenheit" (CR 834). By a dot behind each word the lecture gets an adventure: COMPARED.TO.WHAT. YOU.HAVE.ALREADY. DONE. REGARDLESS.OF. WHAT.YOU.THINK.ABOUT.IT.EVERY.NEW.VENTURE. EVERY. NEW.WORK. SEEMS.LIKE.AN. ATTEMPT.TO.TOPPLE.YOUR.OWN.THURNE.ALTHOUGH.YOU.ARE.THE.ONE.WHO.IS.DOING. THE.TOPPLING.YOU.ARE.ALSO.THE.ONE.SITTING.ON.THE.THURNE.AT.LEAST.THAT'S.HOW. IT.FEELS.AND.THERE.IS.NO.DOUBT.AT.THE.MOMENT.IN.WHICH.YOU.BEGIN.A.NEW.WORK. YOU'RE.EMOTIONALLY.STUCK.TO.YOUR.OWN.CHAIR.THAT.CAN.CHANGE.QUICKLY.ONCE. THE.WORK.HAS.BEGUN.AND.HAS.ALREADY.ACCUMULATED.ENOUGH.PAST.THAT.IT.CAN. ONLY.BE.ENDANGERED.AT.BEST.BY.ANOTHER.NEWER.UNCOMMENCED.WORK.THE. CONFLICT.BETWEEN.THE.NEW.WORK.AND.ALL.OTHER.OLD.WORKS.SEEMS.SO.MASSIVE. THAT.ALL.OTHER.WORKS.APPEAR.TO.DEPEND.ON.THE.ONE.THAT.ISN'T.DONE.AS.IF.THE. ISSUE.WERE.NOT.THE.CREATION.OF.A.NEW.WORK.BUT.RATHER.THE.ENDANGERMENT. AND.REJECTION.OF.ALL.THE.OTHERS.THAT.PRECEDED.IT ... (CR 834).

The two editions on a gift from the Swiss citizen Suetterlin are also concerned with matters of temporality: "In the middle of the twentieth century the second world war took place in Europe. After it was over, the people who remained were poor but happy to have come out alive. A man in Switzerland, a country that had not participated in the war, sent to a man in Germany – where the war had been started, and lost in 1945 – the first Christmas after, a bar of chocolate and a quarter pound of butter. Upon receiving the gift, the man wrote a long letter of thanks. From then on, each Christmas until his death in 1969, Mr. Suetterlin sent him the same package, a bar of chocolate and a quarter pound of butter. By 1949, the man in Germany had already recovered his position as a director of a factory and was well on his way to becoming wealthy. From 1955, he had a chauffeur and his Christmas mail was handled by a secretary, handwritten on a business card." (CR 838, CR 839)

To an increasing extent, the editions realized in the new millennium refer to "Public Authorship" and works in public space completed since 2000. They now bear witness to radical transformations in the relationships between art and the viewer – relationships that Gerz repeatedly subjected to critical scrutiny in his works over the course of the preceding decades and which only now, in the 21st century, lead to a situation in which the viewer is transformed from a consumer of art to its irreplaceable author as a part of the artistic process.

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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