

Jochen Gerz

Catalogue Raisonné

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

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From singular to social creativity

"Art disappears in society" was the title Hermann Pfütze chose for his article in magazine "Kunstforum International" on Jochen Gerz's exhibition "2-3 Straßen" which was part of the European Capital of Culture RUHR.2010 year and ended on 31 December 2010. In that work, Gerz declared everyday life in three streets in the Ruhr region in Dortmund, Duisburg and Mülheim to be art.

1,500 candidates from all over the world responded to ads offering as a basic salary one year rent-free accommodation and in exchange regularly contribute to writing a joint text. The goal of the artistic project was to change the streets. The three cities provided 56 modernized apartments and 78 people from eight different countries (Germany, Japan, Morocco, the Netherlands, Austria, Russia, Switzerland, Slovakia) were invited to live free of rent in one of the three streets for a year. The only condition: The new tenants had to make themselves noticed creatively and to write a text with their neighbours, a chronicle of the one year of real time. The guests of the exhibition and the visitors' school were also able to input contributions into one of the laptops provided, all of which were hooked up to a central archive. In the course of 2010, 10,000 contributions were added in this way, by a total of 887 authors in 16 different languages. The text will be brought out in book form by Dumont in spring 2011 and will have 3,000 pages.

Jochen Gerz's most radical project to date is also one of those that has required the most effort on his part. Weeks if not months and an incredible amount of personal energy are required to create and maintain what Pfütze calls the durable framework for the invisible social stage on which all are welcome. Yet much has changed with a year spent living together in residential areas that are among the social flash points in the urban Ruhr region. Much is being written, painted and played. A loans library is arising, discussion groups are forming, flower beds made and people are cooking together. Old and new tenants are developing a shared life beyond Facebook and social work and in that context not only the creativity of the guests for one year, but also that of the old tenants has been challenged and taken seriously. It is this intellectual upgrading, as one inhabitant put it, that takes so much time, but which comprises a contribution at the end of the year on the pluralization of a creativity from which the majority population in western societies is normally excluded.

Essentially, "2-3 Straßen" is the conclusion of a series of participatory projects in which viewers become authors. The introductory remarks to volumes I and II of his catalogue raisonné explored the fact that the idea of participation plays a manifest role in Gerz's works as early as the late 1960s and early 1970s ("Das Buch der Gesten" (CR 5), "Befragung über die Kunst" (CR 8), "Exposition de 8 personnes habitant la rue Mouffetard, Paris, à travers leurs noms, sur les murs de leur rue même" (CR 30) and others). Likewise, the monument projects and the projects for public space that brought Gerz international fame in the 1980s and 1990s, contained participatory elements ("Mahnmal gegen Faschismus" (CR 89), "Die Bremer Befragung" (CR 112), "The Plural Sculpture" (CR 117), "Le monument vivant de Biron" (CR 120), "Das 20. Jahrhundert" (CR 121), "The Berkeley Oracle" (CR 126), "Les témoins de Cahors" (CR 129)).

In the "Public Authorship" works of the 21st century, these participatory qualities are given a new quality. They emerged as processes across periods that often lasted a year or longer and tended to be carried out jointly with the respective local, regional or national commissioners and partners. The partners included not only public institutions, but likewise the media, museums, universities, parliaments, corporations, associations and project management offices.

Questions were addressed to anonymous newspaper readers and they were invited to make an artistic contribution of their own. Repeatedly, and ever anew members of the public from all walks of society becomes participants and enter into a public dialogue on issues of art, creativity, responsibility and society. Inhabitants of and visitors to cities and rural areas in Germany, France, Great Britain, Ireland and North America are given an opportunity to become part of a larger social community by, for example, making a gift, taking part in a reading marathon, making a secret promise or donating a tree for the "Public Authorship" work. In the course of these processes not only the role and awareness of the participants changes, but so does the role of the artist, who morphs from that of singular creator into that of the initiator of discourses and dialogical and performative processes. Public authorship does not result in a conventional artwork, nor is that their goal. The goal and result are social creativity in an emancipated society, a society that has made art its own affair.

In "Mein Wort/My Word" (CR 873), "woherwohin" (CR 881), "The Newspaper Readers and the Philosopher" (CR 883) and "The Future Monument" (CR 884) Gerz addressed questions to a large number of anonymous participants using the medium of the newspaper. The readers of the two Bolzano based newspapers "Der Dolomit" and "Alto Adige" as well as other newspapers in the exhibition venues for "Res Publica" were invited to write their favourite, important, most cherished word on a newspaper page. The words were transposed by the authors onto T-shirts that were then given on permanent loan by the museum to the participants in "My Word".

Inhabitants of the German, Swiss and Austrian regions surrounding Lake Constance found their newspapers asking them not only: "Where do you come from?", but also "Where would you like to be going?" The answers gave rise to an international and nomadic world map with the places of origin and the desired destinations in a European region that, for all the borders dividing countries, speaks of being inundated by foreigners.

Readers of "Passauer Neue Presse" newspaper were given the opportunity to answer on six pages to six questions: "Is love and love the same thing?", "Is it easier to be a human being today?", "Should we talk about everything? (Do you want to know everything?)", "Will the Nazis return to power?", "How long do you want to live for?", "Can there be happiness on earth?". The answers resulted in a philosophy class with Friedrich Kittler for the participants.

In Coventry, the British city that suffered most destruction by bombing in World War II, Gerz asked in the "Coventry Evening Telegraph": "Who are the enemies of the past?" The eight countries most frequently cited were transformed in public space into the Friends of today.

Also "Le Cadeau/Das Geschenk/The Gift" (CR 874) and "Salviamo la Luna/Save the Moon" (CR 891) address as participants the readers of daily newspapers. In Tourcoing, Dortmund and San Francisco people were invited to have their photo portrait taken in an art centre or museum and in exchange were given the portrait of someone else as a gift to install at home. In Cinisello Balsamo people took part in a public demonstration at night in the city, carrying their own portraits. As participants and authors in both pieces they tackled the ancient artistic theme of the portrait and contributed to its development in art.

Gerz also focused on direct dialogue with the participants in "Le vote de Barbirey" (CR 876), "Anthologie der Kunst" (CR 880), "Der Wettbewerb" (CR 882), "Platz der Grundrechte" (CR 886) and "Tausch der Tabus" (CR 890). Here as before, it was not the artist who chooses who participated but in all instances the individual or the group who decided to author something or to become part of the artwork. In Barbirey-sur-Ouche, each year a jury made up of seven inhabitants of the village give popular gardens the names of a different living person who has impressed them by his or her actions. "Anthologie der Kunst/Anthology of Art" is a snowball system: 312 artists and theorists invite themselves to answer Gerz's question "What is, in the context of contemporary art, your vision of a future art?" The work was created online during one year and was after presented in an exhibition and publication. In two small German towns (Bad Berleburg and Schmallenberg) two mayors asked the inhabitants of their neighbouring towns to write letters to the respective other town hall saying what they liked about their hometown and why they lived there. 63 enamelled sign posts with the answers from the other town are now visible in both places. In Karlsruhe, the city that is home to the German Supreme Court, Gerz asked judges, academics and intellectuals: "What is justice?", and people on whom sentences had been passed down: "What is injustice?" The answers were installed in public space on red enamel plaques on the "Square of Fundamental Rights". In Duisburg, a question of the artist resulted in "Tausch der Tabus/Exchange of Taboos". "Can you describe the object of your search?", was addressed to representatives of eight different beliefs (Catholics, Mormons, Protestants, freemasons, Jews, Muslims, atheists and Buddhists). The answers were engraved on glass panels and installed in venues belonging to one of the other respective faiths.

The invitation to contribute and act is not only the precondition for the decision to author something, but also for the origination of the work. Without the participants in "Les mots de Paris" (CR 875), "Your chair" (CR 879), "The Public Bench" (CR 885), "Die Zeit der DDR" (CR 887), "Platz des europäischen Versprechens/Square of the European Promise" (CR 895), "Amaptocare" (CR 896) and "National Memory Grove" (CR 897) none of these "Public Authorship" works could have been realized.

On behalf of Mission 2000 en France, "Les mots der Paris" was produced in cooperation with the organization dedicated to help the Parisian homeless, "Aux Captifs, la Libération". 12 homeless persons were invited to take part in an exhibition, and passers-by and tourists encouraged to engage in dialogue and make donations. The venue is a bus stop temporarily placed on the forecourt of Notre Dame (design: Norman Foster). In the course of the exhibition, 110,000 francs were raised.

One year later, the experience gained with the Parisian work were brought to bear in the "Il Dono" exhibition in Siena and the "Your Chair" installation realized there. The work for Palazzo dei Papese references the rich inhabitant of Siena who does penance in Dante's Divine Comedy for the fact that despite his wealth he goes out begging. Exhibition visitors have to take a decision. Either they take up the invitation on the wall You may take this chair into the street and ask for money and take the folding chair out into the street and beg in the public space or they respect what they know on art, the venue of art and their own role as viewers.

"The Public Bench" on Coventry's Millennium Square is made up of 2,000 small enamel plates, each with two names and a date. Inhabitants and visitors were invited to add to their own name that of a second person (living, deceased, or fictitious) and to add a date.

On the occasion of Berlin's Academy of Arts returning to its historical location on Pariser Platz Gerz used the dailies to invite the Berlin public for the duration of the exhibition (i.e., 80 days, eight hours a day) to read out texts from the archives of the East German Academy of Arts, for stints of two hours each. The selection of texts, gathered in a kind of book of hours, includes administrative documents, letters, diary entries,

poetry and prose, propaganda and political calls for action. 350 readers took part in "Die Zeit der DDR".

In Bochum, a new square was commissioned by the city and by the European Capital of Culture RUHR.2010. The city's inhabitants and citizens of Europe were able to make Europe a promise that was not published. The names of the participants were engraved in 25 paving stones on "Platz des europäischen Versprechens/Square of the European Promise". The starting point was the so-called Heroes Memorial Hall in the restored ruin of the Christ Church tower. Since 1931, a mosaic there has preserved not only the names of those killed in World War I, but also a list with the names of 28 enemy states of Germany, including France, Great Britain, Poland, Italy, The United States, Russia, Japan and China. The list anticipates World War II and the destruction of Europe. The diversity of the total of 15,000 promises by the living supplements the two historical lists and represents Europe's shared future.

In 2008, Gerz was commissioned by the State Parliament of Styria, Austria in Graz to realize a public piece at the Burgtor, the seat of government. The idea was, 63 years on, to create a plaque commemorating the misdeeds of Provincial Governor Sigfried Uiberreither, who following Austria's Anschluss made a name for himself as a Nazi criminal. Gerz invited the public to assume authorship of a work that is intended not just as an occasion of remembrance. The inscription in the vaulted ceiling of the Burgtor in Graz directly addresses contemporary readers: "Passer-by. Do you want to know where you are standing? Do you want to know, innocent one, who you are? How you bend, when you become a slave to power, its plaything and its victim? Do you want to know how you scream in pain? I, Sigfried Uiberreither alias Friedrich Schönhart-ing, went about my work here from June 9, 1938, to March 31, 1940. I killed many people as Provincial Governor of Styria and in the exercise of my other offices. I did not do it alone. I did not do it myself, I had staff. When you walk through this gate do not be ashamed of me only. Who sought me out? Who took me to court? Why did you say nothing? Who made you an accomplice?" Directly after "Ich, Sigfried Uiberreither, Landeshauptmann/I Sigfried Uiberreither, Provincial Governor" (CR 892) the piece entitled "63 Jahre danach/63 years on" (CR 893) was made in Graz and in Steiermark. In this work, Gerz opened up the form and content of his work even more strongly to public participation than had been the case with the Hamburg "Mahnmal gegen Faschismus/Monument Against Fascism" or in his proposal for the Berlin Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, "Warum/Why".

This act of handing over a statement of one's own attests to a basic confidence in the democratic society of today, to which again Hermann Pfütze has drawn our attention. The deputies in the Styrian Provincial Parliament, as well as the readers of Graz's "Kleine Zeitung" and academics at the University of Graz each contributed to the inquiry into the abuse of power and into everyday life during the Third Reich. "63 Jahre danach/63 years on" had people from all strata of society comment today on photographs from back then, images showing decontamination squads, mass assemblies, forced labourers, and deportations of Jews. The work was a critique of the culture of commemoration and the hypocrisy of Sunday speeches. The results of the public and media process were installed at 20 different public places in the Steiermark.

Two additional authorship works in Ballymun, a suburb of Dublin, remain incomplete to this day. The urban development of the sixties in the north of the city is generally termed a failed utopia, and the idea was to give it a new face. Gerz invited inhabitants to donate a tree to Ballymun which has been hard hit by drugs, criminality and poverty and thus contribute to its future. The trees gifted included ash trees, beeches, birches, cedars, copper beeches, linden trees, maples, oaks, plain trees, rowan trees, Scots pines, silver willows, sophora, and wild cherries. In conversation with Gerz, each donor answered this question: If this tree could speak, what would it say about me? The answers are published on a plaque next to the tree. The large field of names on Civic Plaza, and the glass map of the new Ballymun with the locations of all the trees, re-

mains to be realized. The inauguration of "Amaptocare" (CR 896) is planned to coincide with that of the new underground Metro North in 2014.

Likewise not yet realized is, also in Ballymun, the concept to plant 400 oaks in memory of the seven signatories of the Irish Declaration of Independence of 1916. "The National Memory Grove" (CR 897) is intended to replace seven tower blocks that bore the names of the signatories and gave way to the urban regeneration.

The as yet unrealized "National Memory Grove" in Ballymun in Dublin, a Gerz work on-going since 2005, in more than one way recalls Joseph Beuys' Stadtverwaltung, in the course of which the latter planted 7,000 oak trees in Kassel between 1992 and 1997, together with a basalt column. Both artists share a fascination for Ireland, whose national tree is the oak. Gerz has lived in Ireland since 2007. It was Beuys who coined the term social sculpture to express a concept of art that alters society. Gerz is well acquainted with both Beuys the person and the artist. From the 1950s onwards, the two met on several occasions in Düsseldorf, (where Gerz attended high school).

But Gerz' concept of social creativity differs in one central point from that formulated by Beuys that every person is an artist. For Gerz social empathy replaces the empathy towards art. The concept of the social sculpture formulated as an utopia does not alter Beuys' own view of himself as a singular artist or the character of his own art as works by a singular and creative individual. The Free International University he co-founded is a debate platform for his ideas though not itself art but rather the organizational venue of research, work and communication.

By contrast, in Gerz' view (and this has become increasingly clear over the course of time) it is society which instructs or commissions the artist, art and culture – and not the other way around. The artistic vortex is no longer based on the figure of a single person surrounded by a special aura but derives from society in its entirety, which becomes a place of imagination and the stimulus for art. Gerz has in fact gone as far as to describe the art viewer as a scandal of democracy and to doubt whether cultural consumption in our society is any more justifiable than product consumption per se.

Simultaneously, it is fundamental for him that his ideas should not be understood as utopias to be realized in the distant future, for he insists that in every new work they must become both aesthetic and social practice and responsibility based in the here and now. Today, it is not the individual that he considers to be a reference but life in its incomprehensible entirety, diversity, unfaithfulness and heterogeneous nature. It is above all the public authorship works of the last decade in which this concept of social and plural creativity (understood as a mission society sets both to himself and the community) constitutes the center of the idea of art. Aside from the difference occasioned by their being of two generations what unites the artists is not only the newly and differently formulated tradition of Modernism but also the radical manner with which this happens.

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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