

A Stranger with Secrets:

Jochen Gerz, *Future Monument, Public Bench.*

The Phoenix initiative's choice of Jochen Gerz to work alongside other artists in Coventry is particularly appropriate. While renewal and regeneration have been achieved in Millenium Place through the 'shock of the new' - the concept of Coventry, 'City of the Future' - with its arching glass bridge and Françoise Schein's *24 hour Time Clock*, Gerz's twinned projects, the *Public Bench* and *Future Monument*, have a deep links to Coventry's role as a 'site of memory'. As England's first bombed city, Coventry takes its place in an international network of sites marked by the dialectic between ruin and pain, reconstruction and reconciliation.¹ While Gerz's works are exemplary public commissions in terms of their consultative processes, and as 'public art' involving 'public authorship' they symbolise transnational, personal, and indeed private stories; stories of the anonymous and the disappeared which will never be known.² At the moment of inauguration and at a time of Britian's involmnet in new wars, his complex project, its historic roots in postwar Germany deserves further consideration.

Jochen Gerz was born in Berlin on April 4th, 1940. On August 25th, the first German bomb fell in Fore Street, in the City of London; on November 14th, the city of Coventry was largely reduced to rubble. Winston Churchill declared: 'those who have loosed these horrors upon mankind will now in their homes and persons feel the shattering strokes of just retribution'.³ Dresden, Frankfurt, Cologne's medieval cathedral and Berlin were subsequently bombed: the cityscapes of Germany were no more.

Gerz, too, was a child of the rubble: 'You walked differently, you thought differently, you could walk through houses, you had a double city, you could know it better than the police'....⁴ And for Gerz, Coventry, with its heritage of bombing and reconstruction, has always been the most German of English cities, 'a defeated place in a victorious country'. The Community of the Cross of Nails would soon present crosses of nails to Kiel, Dresden and Berlin.⁵ On my last visit, a wreath from Bremen was laid on

the altar of the old cathedral, under the cross made of two charred beams. This is indeed a special relationship.

Coventry was Britain's beacon city in the postwar years. Together with its mission of reconciliation went the extraordinary artistic effort, celebrated worldwide, that culminated in the consecration of the new Coventry cathedral. It involved the very same War Artists who had rushed to the bombsite. The Gothic spirit of John Piper's *Interior, Coventry Cathedral*, 1940, echoed the ruins depicted; his chiaroscuro purposely evoked Blake, the illustrator of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: 'No light but rather darkness visible'. While English neo-Romanticism looked nostalgically to the past, its dark other was the up-to-date Blitz technology of the V2 rocket, and the future atom-bomb.

As Coventry made gestures towards Dresden and Hiroshima in the postwar period, its rising cathedral expressed a new modernism, a renewed humanism, embellished by Piper's now abstract baptistery stained-glass windows, Graham Sutherland's now hieratic, neo-Byzantine style tapestry *Christ in Glory*.⁶ It was Ralph Beyer who carved in primitive lettering the messages on the eight great tablets of stone that rhythm the nave: 'A New Covenant will I give unto you that ye love one another as I have loved you'.⁷ So Jochen Gerz is not the first artist of German descent to contribute to Coventry's heritage. Nor as he points out, were the Germans the first to raze its ecclesiastical fabric: Henry VIII was responsible for the complete physical destruction of Leofric's medieval monastery, not to mention the intellectual network across Europe that it represented.

Public sculpture in Coventry has always defined moments and styles of the city's history. In the ruined precincts of the old cathedral, Hamo Thorneycroft's elaborate Edwardian effigy in bronze of Huyshe Wolcott Yeatman-Biggs, first bishop of the revived See of Coventry, (1924) contrasts with Jacob Epstein's carved white marble *Ecce Homo* (1934-5) ... and Josefina de Vasconcellos's kneeling pair, *Reconciliation* 1995, offered by Richard Branson to Coventry and the Peace Garden, Hiroshima. Gerz's *Public Bench* and *Future Monument* are radically different, set in the downtown venue of Millenium Place, facing the old Fire Station and Sainsburys, not the hallowed ruins

where the Litany of Reconciliation is recited each Friday at noon: 'The hatred which divides nation from nation, race from race, class from class Father forgive'

For so many years - 1998-2004 - Jochen Gerz took planes by night and day from Paris and other European capitals to Coventry; he laughed and joked with the lofty and the most ordinary townspeople. His mission was to convince the sceptics that his monuments - unlike any notion of sculpture they had previously encountered - were not only feasible but sustainable in a potentially hostile environment. Before and after September 11th 2001, Gerz pursued his goal. 'New York a new Coventry', declared London's *Evening Standard* at the time, illustrating the Twin Towers' destruction with a view through more neo-gothic tracery and twisted girders: that helped at a moment when the question behind the *Future Monument* 'Who are the enemies of the past?' ('the hatred which divides nation from nation...') was deemed most dangerous.⁸

The genesis of the *Future Monument* goes back as far as 1993 when Gerz was strolling through Manchester (his installation 'A Sense of Attention' was in the City Art Gallery).⁹ He noted at the foot of the city war memorial a plaque inscribed 'To our Italian comrades'. Learning that the site was to be redeveloped, he made two rough sketches for a *War and Peace Monument*. The first, surrounding the original obelisk with plaques dedicated to seven nations, was marked 'Former enemies - friends' ; the second, 'Communities, Mental communities, Nation, Race, Identity, Religion, Class, Inclusion/exclusion, Language: in another language, Typographie'.¹⁰ 'Mental communities'? Instantly one recalls Benedict Anderson's important work on questions of nationalism first published in 1983 as *Imagined Communities*.¹¹ Gerz was already experimenting with the paradoxical contrast between obelisk, stone, inscription, and the volatile, immaterial worlds of personal and political emotions.

So the *Future Monument* conceived for Coventry in 1998 had a complex British past. Today, the glass plaque set beside the obelisk proclaims:

The Future Monument is an answer from Coventry's inhabitants to the city's long and often dramatic past. It deals with former enemies becoming friends. Over 5,000 citizens contributed to the artwork. This is a public as well as a personal statement and the city council wishes to thank the many Coventrians from other countries who have participated, joining their own memory to the city's history in an endeavour for peace

and reconciliation. 40 signatures were needed for a group or minority to be offered a plaque behind the obelisk to celebrate the diversity of Coventry's present day population.

Looking towards Lady Herbert's Garden we see plaques at the foot of the obelisk which read:

`To our German friends
 To our Spanish friends
 To our Russian friends
 To our American friends
 To our British friends
 To our French friends
 To our Turkish friends'

Facing the town we see below the obelisk a more irregular scattering of plaques, illuminated from below by night, as is the needle itself: a soft luminescence shining through its layers of fractured glass, 'fragile and dangerous'.¹² The groups represented mark a coming together of various communities across time and space. Surely certain societies must date from the 1930s at least: the Coventry Women's Horticultural Society, the Cyclists, Scouts and Netball players. The revivalist Godiva Sisters - who annually celebrate Lady Godiva's feast-day - epitomise recent 'inventions of tradition'. The Jewish, Irish, Greek Orthodox and Barbadian communities, represented here must have established themselves in Coventry over the years. Many different Asian groups have more recent origins: the Indian Ladies Cultural Association, the Shree Krishna Temple, or the Mrittika Arts Dance Troupe. 'To our British friends' ? With the most extraordinary discretion, this plaque evokes the centuries-long, so often brutal story of Britain's colonial past and today's multi-cultural society. (Gerz has long been fascinated by the tale of the Trojan horse: this provocative message, 'authored' by the local population, is the critical fulcrum of *The Future Monument*).

The changes through time of Coventry's population are also visible in the scattering of red plaques across the great curvilinear sweep of the *Public Bench* - 'freckles on the cheeks of the city' as one good lady put it.¹³ At the beginning of the curve an engraved glass plate reads:

Do you have a friend? Since 1999 the people of Coventry and visitors to the city have commemorated a friendship, as secret relationship or a memorable encounter. The invitation for everyone to contribute to the public bench continues until this space is covered with plaques.

The chosen people could be from Coventry or not, alive or dead, real or fiction. 'Mary Fearon and Margaret Spencer 05-04-1916' included the earliest date I saw; many dates surely commemorated engagements or marriages: 'Frederick Metlaffe, Margaret Metlaffe, 14-12-1924'. Are 'Harjinder Dehal and Teja Singh 30-10-2002', recent lovers or simply an on-the-spot decision by two friends to participate in the project? Are we dealing with Coventrians or visitors? 'Coriena Brierley, Slavica Stojisavljevic 08-09-2002'; is Slavica a resident or tourist from the 'new' Europe (the old Europe before the divisions of the Second World War)? Coventry's history of reconciliation is epitomised by the plaque which bears the names Ron Jordan and Georg-Wilhelm Schulz, one the nineteen year old victim of a U-boat torpedo, in 1942, one, the boat's previous captain. 'Brother marks kindness of former enemy' declared the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*. This reportage is not merely 'newsworthy' but a vital supplement to Gerz's project, an alternative archive, a transmission living memory to thousands.¹⁴

One particular conjunction, 'Irina Ratushinskaya, Gordana Antolovic 10-09-03' bears the symbolic date of Lady Godiva's day. The *Coventry Evening Telegraph* recounts how the dissident Soviet poet, Irina Ratushinksaya, wrote a tribute to Lady Godiva amidst the despair and brutality of a Siberian labour camp in January 1985. ('How little I know of you, Golden-maned lady'...) Gordana, now resident in Britain, translated her own poem about bombing during the 1991 war in Croatia into English, dedicated it to Ratushinksaya, and organised this conjunction of experiences, of time, of countries, wars and of three languages - all condensed into a cryptic inscription on *The Public Bench*.¹⁵

'An engaging personality' was the consensus on the artist at the Warwick University conference of November 2003; but very few were aware who Gerz might be, nor - even when he talked and illustrated his most celebrated projects, the Harburg *Monument against Fascism*, 1986, and the Saarbrücken *2146 Stones. Monument against*

Racism, 1993, that here was one who had a much longer and richer relationship with England than any in Coventry might guess.

Gerz is certainly the most important artist from Germany to make a permanent work in this country since Kurt Schwitters, whose *Merzbarn* was created in the Lake District in the wake of the artist's experiences of London's Blitz. Schwitters' artistic adventure began with the Dada movement in the nihilistic aftermath of World War I; he witnessed with foreboding the rise of fascism in Europe from the late 1920s onwards, then modernism shattered, its hopes and cities bombed to pieces - its shards reassembled as he continued to work almost alone, with extraordinary courage and hope in the 1940s. Like Schwitters, Gerz's work has a Dada heritage; he is a master of the sign; he writes poetry extensively in English and is fascinated by our vernacular. And just as the bus ticket or the advertising jingle entered Schwitters' collages, so the world of popular culture and its friction with the world of art is a constant catalyst for Gerz.

But T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound and e.e.cummings were the mentors who trained Gerz' English ear, as he moved from translation to typographical experiment and the world of concrete poetry in the 1960s.¹⁶ For Gerz is not a sculptor but a poet; he has been a jazz pianist, former London taxi-driver and sports correspondent (his *Empty Plinth* proposed for Trafalgar Square in 1996 is a homage to British football). He began writing in poems and prose in 1958 and studied German and English literature with Chinese civilisation at the university of Cologne, where he became aware of the Dusseldorf-based Zero group, Yves Klein and Fluxus. Then, at the moment of the refounding of the German army and compulsory military service, Gerz absconded to London in 1960. He discovered an austerity London just blossoming into the sixties, with a vital poetry scene that extended through Blake revivals to the Beatles, with major festivals at venues like the Royal Albert Hall or the Roundhouse, Chalk Farm.¹⁷ Here Gerz worked in a bar - and distributed the *Evening Standard*; his taste for newspapers developed as he translated sports results; his taxi experiences extended mental networks of city peoples and topographies.

Returning to Cologne, he subsequently went to live in Basel, Switzerland, where he officially studied prehistory. Here he encountered the philosophers Karl Jaspers and Martin Heidegger, artistic circles around Max Bill and Richard Lohse, and worked for the

publicity agency which organised John Cage events in the city. Cage, rather than Marcel Duchamp was surely a paragon for Gerz at this time, with his ethos of life, art and the environment as a continuum. When his wife won a grant to Paris the couple decamped: Gerz found himself in a far larger, cosmopolitan capital, conscious of its Dada and Surrealist heritage with a visual and sound poetry and experimental music scene. The anti-'art' Situationists, with their concept of *détournement* - swerving away from the norm, perverting the expected - were particularly striking for Gerz, just when Paris itself became a living poem of their posters, slogans and graffiti in May '68.

'Art corrupts' was the motto on stickers which Gerz flyposted on the cathedral doors and the pedestal of Michaelangelo's *David* in Florence in June, 1968 - direct precursors of the red plaques on Coventry's *Public Bench*.¹⁸ And in September, 1968, his first city monument was envisaged. Nothing less grandiose for Jochen Gerz than central Paris's one black skyscraper, the Tour Montparnasse. Gerz's principle of mass participation, again crucial for the Coventry projects, started then. He sent about 800 plastic bags printed with the words 'Is their life on Earth?', to friends, art galleries in Nice, Munich, London, Swansea, Belgrade, Basel, Montevideo and Buenos Aires (the artworld was already global) and to unknown people selected at random from the telephone book. He asked them to jettison their personal mementos: 'So what is proposed here is to free you of whatever you want to get rid of' Finally on April 16, 1970, 300 filled bags were buried in the foundations of the new building - thirty metres below street level, and covered with concrete five metres deep. The Montparnasse monolith (one thinks forward to Harbug) was erected over Gerz's 'signature act': a magnificent appropriation. These secrets that would never be revealed were time capsules contemporary with his *Burials* series; the inscriptions on the *Public Bench* likewise, though mysterious names and dates in Coventry replace jettisoned material objects. Both require ultimately anonymous or 'lost' authors.¹⁹

A shift was definitively confirmed, then, in the 1960s : modern art's most powerful medium was to be the visual not the literary world. A sustained international network and market had been established, with its sacred sites, pilgrimages, festivals, and critical literature, far transcending the slim and untranslated volumes produced by the poetry editors of various nations, each jealous of the language of its tribe.. 'So little

has changed since Joyce....Literature is incapable of assimilating its writers' declared Gerz in 1975. 'Dan Graham, André and Acconci are also former writers who do art now'.²⁰The conceptual art and performance movements, mail art and the explosion of photo pieces with texts were thus related to a global phenomenon of a literature which had nowhere to go, which was urgently seeking new audiences and a new public profile. And a new politics, at a moment when Roland Barthes' notion of the 'death of the author' conjoined with the egalitarian 'everyone is an author': Gerz's commitment to the uniqueness of each personal narrative is unwavering.²¹ Compare the work involved in soliciting extraordinary stories of ordinary people commemorated on Coventry's *Public Bench*, described at length and with photos in the *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, with Gerz's action in the 'Intermedia' festival in Basle in 1969. 5000 cards were thrown off a roof in the town centre inscribed: *If you have found this card you are the missing part of the book I'm writing. Please pass the afternoon in Heidelberg as though nothing had happened and don't let your behaviour be influenced by this notice. Like this I'll be able to finish the book I'd like to dedicate to you.*²²

Already, however, there was a dark side to his work: the performance and photo piece where he led a blind man across the road several times (1970), or the video of Gerz in a bare landscape shouting hoarsely: *To Cry until Exhaustion*, (1972). One day that year - on a sports-reporting mission for the '72 Olympics, he saw a sign to Dachau and followed it on his bike. His artist's life in Basel, London and Paris had managed to bypass direct confrontation with Germany's Nazi past. Now, on September 3, 1972, he took fifty photos in the museum on the concentration camp site. The anodyne paraphernalia of the museum, signs, requests, prohibitions - above all the 'Exit' notice - became signifiers of unimaginable horror. The obscene neutrality of this signage, its 'innocence' implicated every visitor. His installation, *Exit. Materials for the Dachau project*, a 'staging' of his 'documentary evidence' created a scandal at ADA 2, the first Berlin Biennale in 1974: twenty tables and chairs set in two rows, twenty photo-albums, twenty low-wattage bare electric lightbulbs - with a tape of the breath of a person in flight and two electric typewriters....²³This was another invitation to audience participation, to narratives imaginable and unimaginable. The piece was subsequently shown in Paris, where his contemporaries, writer Georges Perec and fellow-artist Christian Boltanski

were starting - obliquely - to broach similar themes within the amnesiac, crisis-ridden period of the early 1970s.²⁴

This is the man then, who was summoned to Coventry; a sculptor in the "extended field", its domains expanding to involve poetry (words), performance (time), photography (space), installation (institutions).²⁵ He is a contemporary, for example, of Britain's Richard Long; both artists, aged thirty-six, represented their countries at the Venice Biennale of 1976.²⁶

When Gerz presents his work to a new audience, it is, however, on the celebrated projects of the 1980s and 1990s that he depends, such as the *Harburg Monument against Fascism*, conceived and executed with Esther Shalev-Gerz, and inaugurated in this Hamburg industrial suburb in 1986. A column clad in lead, twelve metres high, was designed to sink gradually until its complete disappearance in 1993. The public were invited to make a stand against facism by signing the lead surface. 'We were surprised by the violence of the public... some people fired shots at the monument, others used knives, drills, even saws'.²⁷ All too often, the anti-racist slogans *Tod dem Faschisten* or *Nazis Raus* evoked their dialectical other - the disturbing rise in racism during the decade.²⁸ Equally powerful was Gerz's *2146 Stones Monument against Racism* of 1993, generated by his encounter with inscriptions on the walls of a prison cell in the Saarbrücken castle, once home of the federal aristocracy, then Gestapo headquarters, now home to the regional parliament; it dominates the city. Working with students from the Saarbrücken Academy for the Visual Arts (as he did with both Chelsea School of Art and the Coventry University School of Art and Design for the Phoenix initiative), Gerz replaced cobbles in the square with 'placebo stones', engraving the originals with the names of 2146 preserved or 'disappeared' Jewish cemeteries in Germany, prior to their replacement, just as they once were, chiselled-side down. A memorial that was invisible - disturbingly underfoot - initially a clandestine and illegal activity, finally containing 2146 moving secrets. Legalised, the renamed 'Square of the Invisible Memorial' was inaugurated in 1993.

The first reaction to the presentation of a 'counter-monument' or a 'conceptual Holocaust monument' is one of astonishment.²⁹ (Violent reactions may follow later). The public is familiar with figurative triumphalism or pathos; religious and military imagery

(the dying soldier as Pieta) or the abstract symbolism of the Cenotaph. In Europe, abstract versus figurative art debates were been played out in war memorials and on concentration camp sites through the the 1950s and 1960s, with their Cold War connotations of 'abstract-modernist-progressive' versus 'figurative-socialist realist-totalitarian'. Gerz and his generation called a halt. The collapse of the *grands récits* - the 'big stories' about national identity, patriotism, sacrifice, had implications more serious than arguments about form and representation.³⁰ '...It is only when a thing is dissimulated that we insist upon its visibility as if it was due...' said Gerz.³¹ Hence the 'open work'; hence invisibility, hence multiple potentials for interpretation.

The critical excitement generated around Gerz from the 1980s onwards, at a time when he was working with his Russian-born Israeli wife, Esther Shalev-Gerz has been almost entirely linked to Holocaust studies - another 'expanded field' which, towards the millenium, emphasised the the roles of memory within art and society; the relationship between memories repressed, recuperated or falsified; trauma and its psychoanalysis, and above all the uniqueness of individual testimony as generations passed forever. But to read the *Monument against fascism* as 'conceptual Holocaust memorial' - the consensus outside Germany - is far too limiting. The dark coloumn, now completely invisible, was offered to the Harburg citizens precisely to record *their* signature against fascism, even if they 'recommissioned' it, exposing prejudices - and hatreds - over generations. The sunken stele, another time-capsule, is a record of their graffiti: the inscribed signatures together with abusive scribbled or spraypainted graffiti *are* the monument.

To read Gerz's work within the tragedy and pathos of the Holocaust framework alone avoids the question of his active participation in German intellectual life of the period of the *Historikerstreit* - the virulent and often painful debate on history and memory during the crucial periods before and after reunification.³² As it avoids acknowledging his active participation in French intellectual life during this period; he continues to be an exile in Germany, resident in Paris. The reexploration of France's continuing 'Vichy syndrome' has coincided with the trials of Klaus Barbie and Maurice Papon. These have generated responses not only by French artists and historians but by Gerz in projects such as the *The Witnesses of Cahors*, 1998, and, for example, monumental works by Robert Morris.³³ The urgency of these debates in Europe have

passed Britain by; as 'victor' nation we prefer to avoid intellectual debate and self-examination. Yet Gerz's work for Coventry is informed by this European experience both intellectually and formally. Take the *Monument vivant de Biron*: a German artist commissioned by the French state to refurbish a French war memorial (Gerz, with the help of art students from Bordeaux, asked each of the 126 inhabitants of Biron a secret question: only their anonymous answers figure on the monument). This 'Living Monument' with its red plaques, then, was the spiritual ancestor of Gerz's work for Coventry, even if the unrealised Manchester project offered the visual inspiration of obelisk and ground plaques for *Future Monument*.³⁴

Memory brings us back to Coventry. As these questions have been debated, the questions of German pain and the 'inability to mourn' have at last resurfaced in Britain, notably in the writings of W.G. Sebald, a German academic in exile who chose to live here from 1970. His 1999 Zurich lectures, 'On air, war and literature' published posthumously in English in 2003, reiterated again the almost unimaginable extent of the RAF's reprisal bombings of Germany: '1 million tons of bombs on enemy territory.... 131 towns and cities attacked...about 600,000 German civilians fell victim to the air raids and 3.5 million home were destroyed... 7.5 million left homeless... 31.1 cubic metres of rubble were produced for everyone in Cologne, and 42,8 cubic meters for every inhabitant of Dresden'; he discussed the historiography of both the documentation and amnesia of the periods of 'reconstruction'³⁵ Beyond material history, he also examines the immaterial history: the rhetoric of war that corresponded to Coventry citizen's vision of pilots as 'the pagan Hun'... 'inhuman monsters', and afterwards, the silence.³⁶

The silence of the generation of Gerz's parents, and burden of the German in exile in postwar Europe was one that Gerz shared throughout the 1960s and beyond. His first silence robbed him of speech for a year, when, deafened by the blast, he watching his house in flames, trees that 'fell so slowly and burned like candles'; his sister was lost.³⁷ 'The most important factor in my life remains the war I did not fight' ... For all of Gerz's work is autobiographical; the Phoenix project *par excellence*. Autobiographical from his first published work, in 1968, *Footing*, where into an exuberant babble of languages and phrase-fragments, typographical games and inserted signs, three aircraft appear, and the words 'Bombers', red roofs, cry, sirens, North Sea, convoys, sacred duty, torpedos³⁸

It was Gerz himself who suggested the participation of a German theologian for a more developed book upon his work in English. As he grew up - indeed, he spent a year in a monastery with Cistercians and Gregorian chant - he would have been aware of Germany's new 'existential' theology. This attempted to reform religion for a shattered country of bombed churches, for bewildered populations who had nonetheless been structured socially and mentally, as had their British counterparts, by the Judeo-Christian tradition.³⁹ That negativity and silence could be theorised helped. Interest in the concepts 'negative theology', the *deus absconditus*, the hidden God, have a long German tradition extending from the medieval Meister Eckhardt to postwar German art history: Erwin Panofsky at Princeton, and the concept of the light-filled, 'salvational' cathedral. Gerz listened to theologian Karl Barth, along with Karl Jaspers while as student in Basel. Postmodern theologians today find in negative theology a bridge to 'deconstruction'.⁴⁰

So much of Gerz's deconstructive project has involved notions of disappearance, blackness, unknowing, an allegorical groping in the dark : from his *Self Portrait*, of 1975 where he stood, writing backwards upon a pane of glass, till he obscured his image entirely, to his 1998 *Miami Islet*, an homage to American conceptual artist Robert Smithson. Gerz invited the public to bring an empty bottle to the museum and hurl it against the wall in a blacked-out room. The act of throwing was invisible. Thermal imaging of the wall, the heap of glass, could in no way express the artist's intentions or the participant's experience: *'I am engulfed in night...this protective space has turned into the invisible terrain of my own fears... My steps become hesitant and, so it appears to me, echo with increasing volume in my groping blindness. Still no wall in sight... my ears are still ringing with the sound of smashing glass as if I had committed an irrevocable deed....But was my action in this place without significance?'*⁴¹

Invisibility; silence; absence; these may be interpreted in many ways: the dialectical affirmation of sacred presence, the silent witness of the dead, secrets of guilt - personal or national - betrayal, cruelty, Freudian repressed memory, 'poetic amnesia', theologically-inspired *Sprachskepsis*, absolute scepticism, or, in Gerz's case, 'a concrete biographical fact which might be translated as a case of being "too late"'.⁴² Or indeed nothingness. As the tourist drives past Saarbrücken city square, unaware of cobblestones engraved with 'disappeared' Jewish cemeteries, there is no transmission of

history, meaning or memory. The Coventry child of second-generation immigrants runs obliviously over the plaques which might to another suggest the Norman Conquest, the Armada, the Cold War (French, Spanish or Russian 'former enemies'). The response to *The Future Monument* has already been humourous, cynical, irreverent.⁴³

I would argue that the Coventry commission has offered an unusual gift to Jochen Gerz: the opportunity to make an intensely autobiographical work at a historic moment, this continuing period of the Second Gulf War. The relentless bombing of civilian populations, of family homes, of children explodes everyday on our television screens - a diet of terror, sliced and interspersed with advertising and what Ezra Pound and then Jochen Gerz would call *kulchur* ...⁴⁴

Gerz follows his great predecessor Joseph Beuys as an artist-healer; for the public his sculptures, part of the regenerative Phoenix initiative for Coventry, also invite a regeneration in people's minds. But the apparently innocuous, the 'engaging personality', the public face of the artist, hides the nocuous, the principles of inoculation. Gerz provokes, introducing notions of evil, enmity, loss and death; the dialectical others enshrined in the etymology of our languages: host and hostility, friend and fiend: *Feind*, the word for enemy in German, *Gift* the word for poison. Will we always be in a state of war in the twenty-first century? Jochen Gerz sees his works not only as a *Denkmal* - a contemplative monument, but a *Mahnmal*, a memorial containing the future as both warning and as promise. The translucent obelisk of the *Future Monument* plays its part in the new millennial spectacle: a pillar of salt by day, a pillar of cold fire by night. But remember that obelisks in ancient Egypt came in twos, flanking either side of the temple. The obelisk has always a twin, a *Doppelgänger*, an invisible brother. Will the as yet unrealised second obelisk stand in Dresden, Hiroshima, Volgograd or Baghdad?⁴⁵ *The Future Monument* is essentially a work of poetry in the memory theatre of Coventry's millennial projects. I insist again that, beyond the individual universes of personal secrets, Jochen Gerz works with the invisible, the unknowable, the unspeakable, haunted by the technological nightmare of the bomb which shadowed Coventry's neo-Romantic artists of the 1940s and the modernist optimists of its cathedral-building Cold War period; the technological nightmare of today.

¹ See Jeremy Hunt, 'Coventry: City of the Future. The Phoenix initiative', *Art and Architecture*, 60, 2004, pp. 13- 17, With 'sites of memory' I refer of course to Pierre Nora's extended concept of *lieux de mémoire*; see *Realms of Memory, the construction of the French Past*, Culumbia University Press, 3 vols., 1996-8.

² 'Public Art, Public Authorship' was the title of a symposium on Jochen Gerz's work at the Warwick Arts Centre, November 29th, 2003. See also *Third Text*, issue 71, vol. 18, no 6, 2004, special issue on Art and collaboration, including 'Toward Public Authorship', an interview between Jochen Gerz and Stephen Wright.

³ Gerard J. Groot, 'Why did they do it?' , *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, 16 October 1992, p. 18, cited, with Churchill unsourced in W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction*, London, Hamish Hamilton, 2003, p. 19.

⁴ Gerz, Warwick Arts Centre, November 29th, 2003.

⁵ Three medieval nails salvaged from the wreckage of the old cathedral, from the symbol of the Community of the Cross of Nails, an International Centre for Reconciliation of which there are 150 across the world.

⁶ The 'existential' humanist aspirations of Coventry, echoed in the works of a Francis Bacon or a Giacometti, were mirrored by Germany's own aspirations towards the reconstruction of a *Kulturnation* expressed by the *Menschenbild*. See *New Images of Man*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1959, prefaced by the German theologian-in-exile, Paul Tillich,

⁷ Ralph Beyer was the son of Oscar Beyer, author of a book on lettering in the Roman catacombs, *Die Katakombwelt, Grundriss. Ursprung und Idee der Kunst in der romischen Christengemeinde*, Tübingen, 1927. Ralph was trained at Chelsea and with

Eric Gill; see Louise Campbell, *Coventry Cathedral. Art and Architecture in Postwar Britain*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1996, pp. 176-185.

⁸ See Fiona Scott, 'Political sensitivity of city's Phoenix sculptures a worry', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, September 27th, 2001.

⁹ See Richard Gray, 'On a Sense of Attention 1993' (relating to Ford Madox Brown's *Work*, 1862-5) in *Jochen Gerz*, Galerie Sima, Nürnberg, 1993.

¹⁰ Two sketches, August 13th and August 31st, 1993, Atelier Gerz. See also the letter to Richard Gray, Manchester City Art Gallery, August 13th, 1993: 'Voila the concept for the future Memorial proposal replacing the War memorial in St Peter's Square. The existing memorial would be kept, instead of the single "Italian contribution" would be placed in a quite similar way 6 marble plates all around the existing Memorial. This change would mark only the beginning of the new memorial since other Manchester communities contributions could be added from this moment... the other project, the Long Bench (Piccadilly Gardens) has advanced too....' Manuscript additions include the words 'Art School' and significantly 'DRESDEN'.

¹¹ Benedict Andersen, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition, London and New York, Verso, 1991.

¹² 'It is full of contradictions. I relate to the properties of glass in a personal way...' Gerz interviewed by the Student Project group, Chelsea College of Art and Design, London 2000.

¹³ Quoted by Jochen Gerz, inauguration speech, Coventry, January 16th, 2004.

¹⁴ Fiona Scott 'Brother marks kindness of former enemy', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, February 28th, 2003. The Jochen Gerz archive has compiled a complete press dossier.

¹⁵ Irina Ratushinskaya, 'Lady Godiva', written in Labour camp ZhKh-385 near Barashevo, 300 miles south-east of Moscow, translated by Lyn Coffin with Sergei Shishkoff, in *Pencil Letter*, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Bloodaxe Books, 1988, p. 42. See also Lucy Wilson, 'Russian poet in Godiva city fame', *Coventry Evening Telegraph*, September 11th, 2003, p.19.

¹⁶ For the best account of these years see *Jochen Gerz, Come on over to the dark side*, Lucerne, Kunstmuseum, 1979, which reproduces the Pound translation (Canto 99-unpaginated).

¹⁷ Gerz participated in 'Total theatre' at the Studio theatre and 'Concrete Poetry' at the Royal Festival Hall, London in 1968, at the Edinburgh Festival and 'Context', Hatton Gallery, Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1969, the Swansea Art Festival and 'Three towards Infinity/Multiples' at the Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, 1970, and 'Fuselarde' Zees Art Gallery, London 1971, small stops on an expanding international schedule.

¹⁸ *Attenzione l'arte corrompe*, in *Jochen Gerz. Performances, Installations and Works in Public Spaces*, Volker Rattemeyer and Renate Petzinger eds., Verlag für moderne Kunst, Nürnberg, and Museum Wiesbaden, 1999, catalogue raisonné, vol. 1,1, p. 19. (See also vol. 2, *Texts and Mixed Media Photographs, 1969-1999*, 2000; vol. 3, *Editions and Photo/Texts (single works)* and vol. 4, *Works in Public Spaces II (1999-2004)*, 2004, for an idea of Gerz's vast output and bibliography.

¹⁹ *Is there life on earth?* Gerz catalogue raisonné vol. 1, 12, p. 24; for contemporary artworks see Jean-Marc Poinot, *Mail Art*, Paris, Editions Cedic, 1971, and the *Fluxshoe* catalogue, Cullompton, Beau Geste Press, 1972 ; both include Gerz's pieces.

²⁰ Jochen Gerz, *Les Pièces*, Art/Cahier 1, Paris, 1975, interview with Suzanne Pagé and Bernard Ceysson, p. 4.

²¹ Significantly Barthes' 'Le Mort de l'auteur' was first published in the experimental literary magazine *Mantéla*, V, 1968.

²² *The Book of Gestures*, 1969, Gerz catalogue raisonné vol. 1, 5, p.21, (action repeated in Basel, 1969 and Frankfurt, 1972). Each red or blue card had the same number, 326 or 329 written on it - a red herring. For a lengthier literal translation see *326 Public piece*, 1969 in *Jochen Gerz People Speak*, Vancouver Art Gallery, 1994, pp. 32-3

²³ *Exit - Materialien zum Dachau-Projekt*, Hamburg, Edition Hossman, 1972; Jochen Gerz and Francis Lévy, *Exit - Materialien zum Dachau-Projekt*, Frankfurt, Verlag Roter Stern, Hamburg, 1974, and *Exit - Materialien zum Dachau-Projekt*, 1972/1974, Gerz catalogue raisonné vol. 1, 38, p. 38.

²⁴ *Jochen Gerz, Les Pièces*, Art/Cahier 1, exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, 1975; compare the exhibition of Boltanski's *Règles et Techniques* (1972) at the Galerie Ileana Sonnabend, Paris, 1975.

²⁵ For reflections on Gerz, dialectics and time see Ulrich Krempel, 'Timeless Time', in *Jochen Gerz*, Jouy-en-Josas, Fondation Cartier, 1988-9, pp. 138-140 (bilingual).

²⁶ *Deutscher Pavillon: Beuys, Gerz, Ruthenbeck*, Venice Biennale, 1976.

²⁷ Jochen Gerz, interview with Jacqueline Lichtenstein and Gerard Wajcman (1993) in *2146 Stones, Memorial against Racism, Saarbrücken*, Stadtverband Saarbrücken, 1999, p. 7.

²⁸ Thomas Wagner, visual arts editor of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* details the year-by-year rise of racist violence over the decade: 'It is not the Artist who creates the Monument, or The Forked Path of Memory', in Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz, *The*

Harburger Monument against Fascism, Kulturbehörde Hamburg, Verlag Hatje Cantz, 1994, pp. 93-114 (bilingual).

²⁹ For the 'counter-monument' see James Young, *The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1993, and Young ed., *The Art of Memory. Holocaust Memorials in History*, Jewish Museum, New York, 1994.

³⁰ I refer of course to Jean-François Lyotard's definition of postmodernism, translated as 'an incredulity towards metanarratives' (*grands récits*) Significantly, Lyotard's first publication was a review of Karl Jaspers' *Die Schuldfrage (The Question of German Guilt)*, 1946): 'La culpabilité allemande', *L'Age nouveau*, 1948, 28, pp. 90-4.

³¹ Gerz's text upon illusion and visibility accompanies the piece *Self Portrait*, 1975, catalogue raisonné, vol. I, 45, p. 45, (English version of this text in Gerz's characteristic mirror-writing in *Jochen Gerz, Self-portrait*, the Geni Schreiber University Art Gallery, Tel Aviv University, 1995, pp. 33-4).

³²For the *Historikerstreit*, fired by Jürgen Habermas's challenge to Germany's conservative historians in 1986, see Peter Baldwin ed., *The Historikerstreit in context. Hitler, the Holocaust and the Historians' debate*, Boston, Beacon Press 1990; Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust*, New York, Knopf, 1996; Norman G. Finkelstein, *the Holocaust Industry. Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*, London, Verso, 2000. The debate continues.

³³ Gerz's *Les Témoins* interviewed forty-eight women of Maurice Papon's generation the week before his trial in 1998, making posters of their faces with their thoughts, posted in the village of Cahors - disseminated in newspapers *La Dépêche de Midi*, and the German edition of *Le Monde diplomatique*. Compare his 'work' with that of Henry Rousso, (author of *The Vichy Syndrome*, (1987) Harvard University Press, 1991), who has

examined the videotapes of the Barbie trial (1987) and their retransmission (2000) on French television. For Robert Morris's *White Nights*, an installation projecting film from the Centre d'Histoire de la Résistance et de la Déportation, Lyons, see *From Mnemosyne to Clio (1998-1999-2000)*, Musée d'Art contemporain, Lyon, Skira, Milan, 2000 and Philippe Dagen, *De Mémoires*, La Fresnoy, 2004.

³⁴ See Jochen Gerz, *La Question Secrète. Le Monument vivant de Biron*, Arles, Actes Sud, 1996, and Rosanna Albertini, 'Biron- the Living Monument'. White Memory on Red Glaze, *Jochen Gerz, Res Publica, The Public Works, 1968-1999*, Museion/Museum for Modern Art, Bozen/Bolzano, Hatje Cantz Verlag, 1999, pp. 29-32.

³⁵ W.G. Sebald, 2003, p. 3. He mentions the book by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfaehigkeit zu trauern*, (The inability to mourn), first published as early in 1967.

³⁶ '... the "Krieghunden" of the Reich strain at their leashes. Howling and barking to be loosed in order that they may satiate their lust for the blood of innocent human victims.... Do not fail to remember what the pagan Hun has done to us, to our city alone, merits more punishment than they can ever receive. Think of the bleeding starving, enslaved nations of Europe still being crushed beneath the heels of these inhuman monsters.' Ernest Hobbs, *The Battle of the Three Spires. Impressions of a Blind Citizen*, Gloucester, the British Publishing Company Ltd., Coventry July 1942, pp. 5, 26.

³⁷ Doris von Drathen, 'Jochen Gerz: On being the prey of oneself' *Kulturchronik* 2, 1991, p. 18.

³⁸ Jochen Gerz, *Footing*, Paris, Approches-paperback, 1968, Anabas Verlag, Giessen, 1969, unpaginated.

³⁹ Thanks to John-Paul Stonard, whose *Art and National Reconstruction in Germany, 1945-1955*, Ph. D. University of London (forthcoming) contains a detailed discussion of religious life and sacred art exhibitions in postwar Germany.

⁴⁰ Thanks to my colleague, Paul Crossley, for an introduction to negative theology and its historiography in the works of Hans Sedlmayer, Otto von Simson and Erwin Panofsky. See in particular G. Ward, *Barth, Derrida and the language of Theology*, Cambridge University Press, 1995; Rico Sneller's work on Derrida and negative theology, and Oliver Davies and Denys Turner ed., *Silence and the Word. Negative Theology and Incarnation*, Cambridge University Press, 2002.

⁴¹ Doris von Drathen, 'The Stranger within Oneself. Jochen Gerz, Miami Islet', *Miami Islet. Interactive Strategies in the Work of Jochen Gerz*, Kunstmuseum's des Kantons Thurgau, 2000, p. 41 (bilingual) This elaborates on 'Smithson's unrealised 'Island for Broken Glass', 1970.

⁴² Gerz on the 'power of absence' in *2146 Stones*, op. cit., p. 9.

⁴³ Tom Dyckhoff, 'No-score draw for Coventry city', *The Times*, December 30th, 2003

⁴⁴ See Gerz's *Kulchur Pieces, nos 1-9*, 1979-1984, which use Pound's 'multinational' appellation forged as early as 1912.

⁴⁵ 2004 marks the sixtieth anniversary of Coventry's twinning with Volgograd, formerly Stalingrad, the first ever twinning of cities.