



The Art of the Multitude

Jonathan P. Vickery,
Mechtild Manus (eds.)

Jochen Gerz – Participation
and the European Experience

campus

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The basis for this book was the international symposium, *Jochen Gerz: Participation, Commemoration and Public Space*, held on November 14 and 15, 2014 at the Irish Museum of Modern Art (IMMA) in Dublin. It was organized by the Goethe-Institut, the German cultural institute, in cooperation with the Irish Museum of Modern Art and the National College of Art and Design in Dublin.

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Jochen Gerz – Participation and the European Experience

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Introduction

Mechtild Manus and Jonathan P. Vickery

Jochen Gerz is widely recognized today as one of the principal artists of the public realm in Europe. In this volume, ten authors of very different backgrounds explore the power of participation for the formation of public memory, examine conflicts at the intersection of art, politics, and civic life, and extend our understanding of Jochen Gerz's work to encompass questions on European identity, history, and unity.

This volume was initially inspired by a symposium on Jochen Gerz' work that took place in Dublin in the autumn of 2014. The symposium generated an intense debate on participation, commemoration, and public space, and was acutely relevant to issues facing the Republic of Ireland at the time and continue to face Europe. *What do we commemorate, and how? What role does democracy play in memory-making? How does the public participate in official decision-making on commemoration and memorialization in public space?*

In this volume we have used the term *multitude* in the title of the book—a biblical term meaning the many, the undefined, a heterogeneous mixed society—and we use it as a conceptual marker for *the public*, which for Jochen Gerz is subject, partner, participant, collaborator, contributor, artistic material, and always a contested term. Mobilized by the process of collaborative production that Jochen Gerz offers with his artworks, new forms of agency and identity emerge (Kester 2011), if always outside any preconceived template on what constitutes a politically acceptable or representative *public*. The term *multitude*, therefore, serves to evoke a more plural and experiential means of defining collective agency within social life (Virno 2004). We do not use it in the prevailing meaning, defined by Antonio Negri as the masses, the working class, the community, or the revolutionary elite: only in one sense can we agree with Negri when he claims that

“each subjectivity...realizes itself in its singularity, through the acting of the multitude.” (Negri 2001, 97)

The participants, collaborators and observers in Gerz’s projects are characterized by social diversity (but where *social diversity* is never one unproblematic category that achieves a guaranteed democratic legitimacy). The graffiti of the *Monument Against Fascism* (Mahnmal gegen Faschismus, 1986) in Hamburg-Harburg (Germany) showed the antifascist next to the Neo-Nazi; the inscriptions of *The Public Bench* (1999–2004) in Coventry (UK) brought together citizens that would otherwise never speak to each other; random passers-by in the pedestrian zone in Bochum (Germany) subscribed to the *Square of the European Promise* (*Platz des europäischen Versprechens*, 2004–2015); the 78 participants of *2–3 Streets: An Exhibition in Cities of the Ruhr Area* (*2–3 Straßen. Eine Ausstellung in Städten des Ruhrgebiets*, 2008–2010) consisted of young men and women searching for meaning of life, along with a rebellious curator, a philo-muslim critic of Islam and all kinds of other people, regardless of nationality, religion, political affiliation or class. Jochen Gerz is facilitator and orchestrator who co-joins them in ways that demand that each subject confronts her own social agency, as well as ingrained patterns of thought and prejudices (Rebentsch 2014, 71).



Here in Paradise, in Sneem (Ireland), opening of the outdoor exhibition on May 31, 2014.

All the essays in this volume are concerned with the art of Jochen Gerz, but necessarily extend to examples of related works by artists in other European countries, and as contemporary art is now a *global* economy of meaning, beyond Europe. The volume is divided into three sections, where the section on *participation* is deliberately framed between *memory* and *public space*. Participation is thus central but not as a political principle of mobilization in support of pre-packaged or partisan choices. Participation in this volume features as a collective commitment to facing and determining questions, learning how to generate public dialogue, and taking responsibility for the conditions governing our collective social experience. The art of Jochen Gerz and others discussed in this volume foster empathy, where empathy is a social practice and where the experience of art establishes an inter-subjective, social moment that can open the participants to specific ethical and political questions (Rebentisch 2014, 57). However, this social moment is less an ultimate goal being striven for, than an intrinsic factor of art's aesthetic operations (ibid., 72). And it is a reflexive moment that keeps this kind of art from embedding itself in everyday rationalization, with its pattern of consumption, or indeed perpetuating forms of spectacle; rather aesthetic experience opens up an ethical-political potential (ibid., 71).

The tendency to combine moments of the past with the socio-political situation of the present characterizes many kinds of contemporary and performing arts. Some works of re-enactments (Milo Rau, Jeremy Deller) as well as participating works by Jochen Gerz in Hamburg-Harburg, Biron, Cahors, Saarbrücken, Coventry and Bochum, project through confrontation "those aspects of past events that have not yet been compensated, understood or dealt with" into the present (Rebentisch 2014, 200). And with his latest work, the *Square of the European Promise*, inaugurated on December 11, 2015, Jochen Gerz directs the act of commemoration through the promises of 14,726 members of an international multitude towards the unknown future of Europe.

It is impossible to discuss or interpret Jochen Gerz's work without at the same time responding to major issues on democracy and culture: the right to speak and be heard, and the role of social experience in the public sphere. Yet even though many of his works are, in effect, created by participants, this cannot be described as some kind of *democratic art production*. The asymmetry between artist and public is not abolished. All actions by the participants are still happening within the framework provided by the artist (Rebentisch 2014, 36). Rather, the demo-

cratic power of the artworks lies in the conflicts that the participants address through their contribution, and in the conflicts among themselves, and with the artist that might evolve in the process. In this way Jochen Gerz avoids the pitfalls where the participative work becomes a caricature of democracy (Diederichsen 2008, 275) or a new means to increase economic efficiency (Miessen 2010). Participation is therefore not simply the subject of this volume, nor itself a discrete object of theoretical speculation. It is an emergent characteristic of aesthetic, performative ways of creating the conditions for a democratic European public culture. And *memory*—historical narrative, responses to past events or personages, the landscape of monuments and memorials, archive and document, the civic rituals of commemoration and remembrance—is internal to participation. In other words, the contributors to the book take an interdisciplinary approach to this complex of concepts and do not separate them out as objects of an academic specialism.

There is one tangible practice that brings together our theme of participation with sub-themes of public space, memory and contemporary Europe—that is the contemporary *monument form*, sometimes referred to as the “new monument” (Sommer, 2007) or “countermonument” (*Gegendenkmal*), of which the works of Jochen Gerz have become seminal if not iconic (*Monument Against Fascism*, 1986, for example). While the content of this volume will extend far beyond countermonument as a subject, Gerz’s approach to countermonument (translated as “Antimonument”) is a focal point as it is animated by ethical, political and aesthetic interests that inform his non-memorial work as well as the work of other artists in Europe today. All of his works (and this volume refers to many, including text-based works or the innovative urban project *2–3 Streets: An Exhibition in Cities of the Ruhr Area* for the European Capital of Culture Ruhr 2010), are animated by questions of public space and dialogue, memory and narrative, Europe and democracy.

Jochen Gerz (born in Berlin in 1940) is both author and subject of hundreds of articles and numerous books. He began his professional life as a translator, poet and journalist, has worked in several European countries and now lives in the Republic of Ireland. In the 1960s he founded a co-operative publishing press, began making visual art with photography and text, and in the 1970s initiated a range of projects involving video, installation, performance, workshops, and lecturing. With a growing reputation as a conceptual artist, he nonetheless defied

specific categorizations. He exhibited at the German pavilion with Joseph Beuys at the Venice Biennale in 1976, and since 1984 has concentrated on installations and public art projects. He has been awarded the Roland Prize, Bremen (1990); the German Art Critics' Prize, Berlin (1996); National Order of Merit, Paris (1996); Peter Weiss Prize, Berlin (1996); National Grand Prize for the Plastic Arts, Paris (1998). He has conducted major works in over twenty European cities and in other cities around the world, including New York and San Francisco.

The four volumes of Gerz's substantial *Catalogue Raisonné* were edited by Renate Petzinger and Volker Rattemeyer and published in 2011 by Verlag für Moderne Kunst, Nürnberg and the Museum Wiesbaden. The *Raisonné* contains reference to over 900 artworks and projects, and reference to countless publications by, and about, Jochen Gerz. In the late 1990s, Gerz effectively withdrew from the mainstream art economy of art gallery exhibition circuits, and devoted himself almost exclusively to the public realm and public commissions. Key exhibitions of his work still emerged in various formats, from a Centre Pompidou selective retrospective in 2002 to the permanent installation of a major work (the second of three versions of this project) *The Gift* (2000) in the lobby of the Ostwall Museum (at the Dortmunder U creative center in Dortmund) in 2000. As this volume illustrates, while Gerz's work remains highly relevant to contemporary participatory art, new urban public art, as well as new community art movements, his distinctive approach to social interaction, communication, and the politics of space have, since the late 1960s, evolved according to a specific trajectory.

This was as apparent with the four exhibitions in Bolzano (Italy), Kiel (Germany), Windsor (Canada), and Tønder (Denmark) that took place between November 1999 and November 2000 and whose catalogue-book remains available under the title *Jochen Gerz. Res Publica. The Public Works 1968–1999*; it was also apparent in the 2002 Centre Pompidou retrospective that focused exclusively on his video and internet-based work (Gerz 1999; 2002). What changed in the work of Jochen Gerz in the late 1990s was the scale, location, and type of public commissions that he attracted—along with a more emphatic commitment to a pluralist, democratic and unified Europe.

The authors of this volume are thus indebted, whatever their range of specific references, to the literature by Jochen Gerz, and particularly his own writings: *The Living Monument of Biron* (*Le monument vivant de Biron*, 1996), *The Witnesses of Cahors* (*Les témoins de Cahors*, 1998), *Monument Against Fascism* (1999), *2–3 Streets*



The Gift (Das Geschenk) in the lobby of the Ostwall Museum in Dortmund (Germany).

(2011), *Gegenwart der Kunst: Interviews (1970–1995)* (1997), and indeed by others, the monograph of Andreas Vowinkel (1997) and Markus Landert's edited volume (1999). Added to this, editors Vickery and Manus, along with contributors Mesnard, Pfütze, and Hohlfeldt, have in the past engaged professionally with Jochen Gerz in various capacities.

The sections of this book adhere to a pattern, whereby the first chapter focusses on a specific aspect of Jochen Gerz's artistic practice and then the second and third chapters progressively expand the frame of reference and subject matter—to Europe, but also beyond. Most books on artists maintain an exclusive focus on the individual artist as agent of creative production, and where this agent is defined (as

our European tradition since the Renaissance) in terms of the self-assertive ego and where methods of art making invariably double as the ego's means of individuation. Jochen Gerz, however, as several chapters of this volume explain (Vickery, and Hohlfeldt, particularly) avoids and often subverts this European tradition, and not (merely) by way of avant-garde or postmodernist critique, but by appealing to another European tradition of art making—involving a collective and plural subject, or, in our terminology, the multitude.

The first chapter “The Artist as Facilitator of Civic Memory” therefore opens with a discussion of the role of Gerz as *artist*, and how his newly termed “Public Authorship” project was engineered in the city of Coventry between 1999 and 2004. Jonathan P. Vickery addresses the role of culture and democracy in the city’s development of its urban economy, and situates the use of memory as the material for Public Authorship’s participatory approach to engagement with city residents. As always, questions of value, authority and legitimacy are central to Vickery’s approach to this subject: he assesses the civic validation of the artwork, and how the project’s two main artworks—*The Future Monument* and *The Public Bench*—exemplify a potential role for art in articulating the social conditions of public culture in a European city whose public life is incoherent and fragmented in equal measure.

Continuing with the artist’s authorial presence in “The Tiny Presence of Words,” Philippe Mesnard offers a poignant critical meditation on the *social subjectivity* of the artist, particularly in relation to Gerz’s method or conceptual ap-



Monument Against Fascism
(Mahnmal gegen Faschismus)
in Hamburg-Harburg 1986.

proach to specific places or people. Mesnard draws on his extensive knowledge and experience of Gerz's work, and with reference to works that range from the World War memory projects at Biron and Cahors to the socially-oriented *The Words of Paris (Les Mots de Paris, 2000)* in central Paris. Mesnard creates a sharp distinction between Gerz and the work of other artists with whom he is often associated—Hoheisel or Boltanski, for example—and casts Gerz principally as a *literary* thinker: Gerz's mobility, presence, and role in a given place, activates the public's attentiveness to the words and narratives through which their social position in relation to historical institutions, social structures and their representations, are cognized.

Mesnard's emphasis on communication and dialogue animates Zuzanna Dziuban's concern with truth, testimony and justice in the section's concluding chapter "Countermonument in Europe: Spatial Politics of Artistic Memory-Work." With Gerz as a seminal moment—notably the *Monument Against Fascism* (1986)—Dziuban offers an assessment of critical countermonument practice since then, which, she explains, should be central to Europe's acknowledgement and comprehension of the mass violence that has so characterized its recent history. However, where countermonument practice has become absorbed in a new official politics of memorialization, characterized by literal techniques of negation or simple inversions (commemorating victims as opposed to victors), Dziuban draws our attention to more recent forms of *artistic memory work*. Enlightening us to the logic of countermonumentality, particularly with reference to practices outside the realm of the large-scale public commission, we are introduced to the *biopolitical countermonument*. With reference to theorists Hardt and Negri, and artists Grupa Spomenik, Forensic Architecture and Krzysztof Wodiczko, among others, Dziuban eschews countermonument as "mere critique" and advocates place-based practices of bottom-up "forms of social life." This forms a *counter* power, not merely an object of critique, where the power to resist emerges from a production of critical subjectivity.

The second section "On Participation: Social Creativity, Culture and Democracy, Citizenship and Its Alternatives" opens with Hermann Pfütze's account of Jochen Gerz's *2–3 Streets: An Exhibition in Cities of the Ruhr Area*. Featuring original research material garnered from detailed fieldwork and wide-ranging interviews, Pfütze recalls much more than the general form of the now-famous event that was central to the European Capital of Culture Ruhr 2010. While *2–3 Streets*

could lay claim to be the largest public art project ever commissioned in Europe, Pfütze concentrates, rather, on its concealed dynamics and their social significance. He scrutinizes what Gerz termed the “invisible” exhibition of the streets—in terms of the social economy of aesthetic production and its implications for our understanding of participation, art, and society. The chapter “As Art Disappears into Society” thus moves from an empirical account of the work itself and Jochen Gerz’s role as artist, to a sustained theoretical deliberation on the work as a micro-economy of social reproduction. The significance of social creativity for Pfütze is exemplified in this real-time experiment: it allowed for surprise experiences, communication, and generated a place-specific form of use value.

Marion Hohlfeldt’s chapter “Public Authorship as a Multitude of Voices” exeges, and so amplifies, a central term of self-reference first formulated by Jochen Gerz in the year 2000 around the time of *The Future Monument* project in Coventry (see also Vickery’s “The Artist as Facilitator of Civic Memory”). Hohlfeldt defines “Public Authorship” less as a preconceived artistic method and more as a responsive and reflexive form of dynamic dialogue. Like Mesnard she uncovers the deep literary character of Gerz’s work. Even where memorialism and public space are evidently central to Gerz’s concerns, his means and media revolve around his use of words, the management of dialogue, and of public interlocution. In doing so, for Hohlfeldt, he undermines our entrenched concept of author, along with its dominating authority, and so facilitates the presence of multiple authors, a “multitude of voices.” The “proliferation of meaning” that Hohlfeldt defines with reference to a wide range of poststructuralist and critical thinkers, reverses the relationship between producer and recipient, and can potentially play a central role in our formulation of strategies for participation in democratic society. Public authorship therefore signifies a way of understanding a complex dilemma central to current debates on European political agency, particularly in relation to Europe’s identity and the question of memory, shared narrative, and ethical-communal experience.

The third of this section’s chapters, “Dissonant Memories and Subversive Memorialization Practices,” perhaps amplifies the consequences of failing to develop a fully participatory democratic space—with reference to the frontiers of Europe, the Balkans region. Milena Dragićević Šešić, demonstrating her decades of engagement with Balkan contemporary art and the public politics of memory, reveals how central the politics of memory remains to so much contemporary art

using public space. Articulating the fate of private, public, and official memory-making, this chapter takes as its theme the *counter* in countermonument, and argues that the strategies of resistance and opposition within Jochen Gerz's work also characterize the subversive memorialization in a lot of Balkan contemporary art. The chapter is punctuated by the counter-hegemonic positions of artists ranging from Braco Dimitrijević to Nikola Džafo, the Monument Group and others. Particularly since the breakup of Yugoslavia, questions on the public acknowledgement and admission of the truth of past events have become more crucial to the honesty and openness of democratic deliberation. This is a part of Europe whose geo-politics have created precariously defined borders and cultural boundaries: Dragičević Šešić offers us an insight into the dilemmas facing contemporary artists throughout the Balkan region.

The cultural consciousness of a city is the subject of Volker Heins's opening chapter "Taking People as They Are and Europe as It Might Be: The Controversy over the *Square of the European Promise*" in Bochum (Germany) to section III "On Public Space: Cities, Architecture, and Politics." Focusing our attention on a work by Jochen Gerz still in progress during the writing of this chapter—*Square of the European Promise*—Heins offers us a forensic look at the policy processes and politics of space that have dominated the city of Bochum's commission and the project's delayed completion. Heins's specific contribution to this volume is his articulate theoretical conjectures on the normative dimension of the artist's public intervention, and drawing on his field research on this project, he uses this complex situation as "an heuristic for identifying zones of cooperation and compromise between the artist and other actors, but also as a way of discovering the non-negotiable core of his aesthetic practice." In doing so, the site of Gerz's project—Bochum's *Christuskirche* and the adjacent square—provokes us to again meditate on Europe, its constitution, membership, old enmities, and lines of differentiation between inside and outside. For Heins, the fate of European cities as spaces of democracy is registered in how cities understand and facilitate the memory-work of such public culture.

Malcolm Miles, in the chapter "Civic Remembrance and the Politics of Place," maintains this political trajectory, albeit expands our frame of reference: this chapter situates Jochen Gerz in the urban symbolic landscape of public memorials and their politics of place, historically and geographically. Miles's principal subject is civic remembrance, and how, across time and space, we can find common eth-

ical themes in each country and each society's attempt to acknowledge its dead or cataclysmic events. Miles maintains a dual focus on the object and the performative—the empirical objects and spaces that are memorials (statues, war monuments) along with the performative rituals and acts of remembrance that each memorial space either facilitates or presupposes. Rich in art historical, literary and architectural reference, this chapter cuts across social, cultural, and political readings of key monuments, memorial sites, and contemporary art projects. Miles alerts us to why dominant constructs of the civic, of remembrance, and of place, need to be de- and re-constructed if we are to forge historical narratives within which we can locate not the interests of elites but of citizens: "This requires conditions in which exchanges of opinions and claims to space and visibility are contested without the threat (or actuality) of violence and social breakdown." Miles's extensive travels—from Argentina to Armenia—provide us with a diverse range of examples, giving occasion to ponder on the way art and memory reveals how values, authority, allegiance, and the specter of death and sacrifice that haunts all hubristic proclamations of national supremacy, remain alive and relevant to a *post-national* era of globalization.

This last section and so this volume ends with a series of interrelated critical insights by Niklas Maak. Opening with Gerz's *Monument Against Fascism* and concluding with *The Words of Paris*, the chapter "Absorbing Disturbances: The Heterotopia as a Model for Monumental Space" mounts a trenchant attack on the corporate instrumentalism of recent large-scale public art commissions before turning to its main focus—the emergence of "counterstructures" (a counterpart to countermonument) as a new art for public space. Maak's concern is how public space can become activated for democracy—a politics of utopia where utopia maintains a critically-engaged social pragmatism. For Maak, public space is not a self-evident empirical reality; it is a performative challenge. Where the categories of private and public have all but collapsed in social life, the *public* in any designated space needs to negotiate a problematic political landscape. As *counterstructures* exemplify—sometimes architecture, sometimes sculpture—we do not require huge resources to reconfigure spaces and so construct places that re-activate the public and provide new loci of democratic processes which have since become congealed or made ineffective by prevailing political systems. Counterstructures can simulate *counter utopias*, which in reality may be unattainable non-places, but where "the possibility of a totally different life can be rehearsed."

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I. On Memory: Artists, Writing and Narratives, History and Testimony



The Future Monument in Coventry.

The Artist as Facilitator of Civic Memory: Coventry's *The Future Monument* and *The Public Bench*

Jonathan P. Vickery

Jochen Gerz has become Europe's foremost practitioner of art for the public realm—his widely regarded projects include the *Monument Against Fascism* (1986–1993; realized in collaboration with Esther Shalev-Gerz), *2146 Stones—Monument against Racism* (Saarbrücken, Germany, 1993), *2–3 Streets. An exhibition in cities of the Ruhr Area* (in Dortmund, Duisburg and Mülheim/Ruhr as part of the European Capital of Culture RUHR 2010 in Germany), and the *Square of the European Promise* (Bochum, Germany), inaugurated on December 11, 2015. And yet, Jochen Gerz cannot easily be situated within contemporary “public art” or the spectrum of practices known as “participatory art”.

One distinctive characteristic of Gerz's work is his investment in the processes of making forms of art for a democratic public realm, and with explicit reference to the condition of Europe and European unity. In this chapter I will attempt to define how Gerz's work exemplifies something prescient for our understanding of the current conditions of public culture and democracy, particularly civic democracy in a Europe currently ridden by disunity as it is by mass immigration and a massive diversification in culture and values. I will do this by looking at two key works—*The Future Monument* and *The Public Bench*, both of which remain in the city center of Coventry in the UK. Both *Monument* and *Bench* emerged from a participatory project lasting over four years, and being situated within a heavily managed urban development project that, it was said, would bring a *civic revival* to the city. Today, the works remain intact, and while *The Public Bench* suffered from vandalism and was renovated by the city authorities in 2013, the vandalism stimulated more public attention—particularly from one-time participants who would visit to check whether their contribution had been ripped off (perhaps intentionally). The *Bench* remained (except for one short period) fully in use throughout the renovation. In fact, being one of the few places to sit in the vicin-

ity, and fortunately south-facing, it remained a very popular place for those with time to spare, often the unemployed, refugees or visitors. *The Future Monument* to this day is rarely without someone (often teenagers hanging around or skipping school) ambulating around it, attempting to read its rain soaked plaques. The *Monument's* appearance has been inflected by plant life growing within it—notwithstanding the use of weed killer by the city's maintenance personnel, various unidentifiable plants are still growing inside, stimulating an inadvertent interest in the city's arts community.

From the outset, from the announcement of the commission in the summer of 1998, Jochen Gerz's approach to participation provoked expectations for a new and pervasive sense of civic democracy. Gerz's artistic sensibility and sense of intellectual orientation is never obvious, as he is never dogmatic and prefers to express himself through discussion, or writing; his life story is complex, with a personal history that stretches from the Allied bombing of Berlin (1940–45) to a career as a transnational journalist, poet, writer, conceptual and performance artist. Furthermore, his work is singularly significant in mediating current dilemmas on the political complexion of European identity. His concept of "Public Authorship" emerged in Coventry amidst a huge wave of public commissions by the UK government as part of the Millennium celebrations. Public Authorship was one project that generated two quite distinct artworks, and where both works maintained quite different functions in the symbolic landscape of the city. The *public* in "Public Authorship" was not, however, synonymous with *social engagement*, nor was it community mobilization. The *public* content demanded an individual participation through speaking, writing, literacy, cooperation, and various activities involving self-representation. Public Authorship also emerged out of Gerz's well-known commitment to *countermonument*. Furthermore, Public Authorship involves a range of discursive practices and public communication that are never repeated by the artist, at least in quite the same way. It does not generate a model of practice, and its characteristic "techniques", if we can use such a term, were the techniques (or indeed technologies) of common public communication (reportage and public information, documentary photography, public statement, or testimonial).

Since Hobbes, European political thought has agonized over democracy as a problematic theoretical concept whose intelligibility is indissolubly bound up with the evolving historical institutions and practice that govern the role, func-

tion, and identity of *the people* vis-à-vis political authority. Endemic problems relating to the nature of social cooperation, solidarity, and collective identity, participation and representation, have all remained central to democracy theory, and intellectually are of perennial interest to Gerz. Yet because of his profound antipathy to the German mass movements of the past, he resolutely avoids any preconception or *model* of democratic association, not least any strict formalization of an organized social gathering or explicit principle of *unity* or social homogenization. Gerz never commences his projects by *enrolling* members or enlisting willing workers or by activating local frameworks of solidarity or social collaboration (such as the trade unions, or churches, or established social movements). His projects, rather, open with *an invitation*, a question, an event of free association, and all beckon the individual for an involvement, which for the participant always maintains their self-determination (or conducts themselves how they choose).

Public Authorship

The Future Monument is a 4.6 meters high obelisk made of a glass compound—around which, to the north, are names of associations or groups of citizens. On the south side are plaques engraved with the names of former enemies who are now, or will be, “friends”. The glass surface of the obelisk is shattered (sealed with a thick compound surface) and is lit up from within during night. *The Public Bench* features over 2000 plaques bearing the names of Coventry residents, and the names of anyone, real or imagined or anywhere in the world, who remain significant in the *memory* of a Coventry resident.



A plaque engraved with the names of former enemies.

The *Bench* runs along the north rim of the square, made of concrete and wood, 45 meters long. Physically the two works are close, but not contiguous.

The initial public art commission was facilitated by Vivien Lovell of Modus Operandi, a public realm consultancy positioned within a City Council appointed design team (Lovell 1998). The team was directed by the late Sir Richard MacCormac (of what was then called MJP Architects) who acted as director of a large section of this, the largest urban redevelopment since the post-War bombing reconstruction. The City Council heavily branded the project from late 1999 by establishing an urban regeneration agency, *The Phoenix Initiative* (Lovell and MacCormac 2004). Through the six years' duration of the city center regeneration, Gerz's works were for the most part without a site: they were to be unveiled in 2003 (postponed to January 2004) in the newly designated and as yet unbuilt Millennium Place. The creation of the new plaza did not emerge without public consternation: the demolition of the 1930s Art Deco Hippodrome Theater provided for the new space, a fact that only heightened the city's critical (and political) sense of the material conditions of civic memory-making. (Vickery 2011; Goulden 2001)

The *Place* (alternately referred to in the local press as place, square or plaza), was central to the urban re-design proposition as Coventry hitherto had no civic marketplace that functioned as a central square (a common fact of English, as distinct from Continental European, cities). Yet, in the event, the design team's *masterplan* positioned the plaza in a broader scheme that was genuinely sophisticated. The entire area (in and around the plaza) would be structured as a metaphorical journey (the actual trajectory was a pedestrian route through Coventry's historic center). The *journey* tended to a didactic form of moral pedagogy. It was animated by the theme of reconciliation between the past, its industry and national self-assertion, and the present and its aspirations for (a less aggressive) renewed industry and international peace. The paradox—the intrinsic relationship between historic industrial might and the perpetual need for material resources; of industrial ascendancy and colonialism—was lost on most.

On paper, the design ran from the bombed-out Coventry Cathedral of World War Two (and adjacent ecclesiastic-archaeological ruins) through a newly created boulevard, and into the new plaza over which a new frontage of the famous Coventry Transport Museum opened. The journey continued around a new spiral ramp and up to a parkland area entitled (and themed, with its garden design and

especially-composed poem engraved onto a bronze strip cladding the top of a wall), the Garden of International Friendship. This would, and to some extent did, provide an emotive and culturally inspiring fulcrum—albeit overcrowded with public art—and a prelude to the re-branding and marketing of Coventry city center as a place for public culture. However, the project did not begin well. The boulevard was scrapped as the chain supermarket on the corner suddenly realized that in any future design (and photograph) of the plaza their branded fascia would be central: they refused to move and remain there to this day. On hearing this news, the architect, a brilliant innovator, drew a sketch of an archway on the back of an envelope—this later became what is now called the Whittle Arch (after the native celebrity, Frank Whittle, inventor of the jet engine). The archway remains a brilliant device for raising the eyes of the viewer—from the ground upwards, and from where the ‘boulevard’ idea was corrupted and is now an unflattering alleyway, skirting the perimeter of the adjacent supermarket.

Gerz spent over four years—as commissioned artist, but also visiting professor at Coventry University School of Art and Design—walking around the city and talking. In terms of scope, his Public Authorship project was huge and demanded a professional project manager (Olivia Morel-Bransbourg). By 2004 it had involved over 5000 individual participants, over 70 communities, countless local media events, a range of public symposia, and student research expeditions. Conceptually, most of the seminars and public events revolved around the theme of the public role for art.

As a commission *The Future Monument* and *The Public Bench* are visually very different, but both feature the visual element of the plaque. Conceptually, they address relationships, and the historicity of relationships—of friendship and enmity, and how the memory of these phenomena defines the story that is our lives, individually as collectively, and so too, the life of our city. One might think that this was an uncommon way of thinking about a city—*who are its enemies and friends?* It was not so uncommon for many of Coventry’s diverse populace of ethnic minorities or temporary residents (such as refugees). The story of Coventry (as Gerz discovered and uncovered) has revolved around (as successive historians have remained fixated on) the bombing of World War Two. The mental scars across the psycho-geography of the city retain the War as a principal source of its narrative of origins, and with the aftermath and reconstruction as further generative of a civic *raison d’être* and a means of moral self-definition. The city press, *The*