

Matthias Reichelt and Curt Germundson (2002):

The Reception of the Art of Boris Lurie and NO!art in the Context of the Holocaust Debate in Contemporary Germany

with corrections and short annotations by Boris Lurie

5 In this essay the authors will investigate the reception of the art of Boris Lurie and NO!art in Germany, using as examples mainly three exhibitions that took place in the 1990s. Hereby we will concentrate on those works by Boris Lurie that touch upon the Holocaust committed by German fascism and its collaborators, for this topic is of special importance regarding the work's reception in the "land of the perpetrators." We are well aware that this is only one aspect of Boris Lurie's complex work, who himself was a
10 victim of the Nazi race-politics, for he and many of the artists associated with him in the sixties dealt in their paintings, assemblages, happenings and installations, intensively with many contemporary political themes.

Exhibitions of Boris Lurie's work in the Federal Republic of Germany took place in 1973¹, 1974², as well as in 1988³. In 1995 a project group of the Neuen Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK) (New
15 Association for Visual Arts) in Berlin organized the largest NO!art retrospective so far. Because there were so many more works by Boris Lurie available, the project group decided to present an additional monographic exhibition at the Haus am Kleistpark of works by Lurie, the central figure and sole survivor of the legendary triumvirate of the NO!art movement (the other two being Stanley Fisher and Sam Goodman).⁴

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Antifascism in the Neuen Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst (NGBK)

At the height of the student movement and the extra-parliamentary opposition, the NGBK came forth in 1969 out of the split of the "Deutschen Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst" (German Association for Visual Arts). Another major impulse for the student movement, besides the defining of new scientific goals
25 and contents, was the exposure of personnel-continuities from the Nazi period within the sciences in the Federal Republic in Germany.⁵ The provenance of the academic personnel was unmasked with the slogan "unter den Talaren der Muff aus 1000 Jahren" ("underneath the gown the musty smell of 1000

¹ "NO!art seit 1959," Galerie René Block, Berlin.

² "Boris Lurie bei Inge Baecker," Galerie Inge Baecker, Bochum. "NO!art-Bags," Galerie und Edition Hundertmark, Cologne.

³ "Feel-Paintings," Galerie und Edition Hundertmark, Köln. The book by Boris Lurie and Seymour Krim was published in 1988 by Edition Hundertmark, NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew-art.

⁴ "NO!art," NGBK in Berlin Kreuzberg, 10. 21 - 11.26. 1995, "Boris Lurie und NO!art" im Haus am Kleistpark, Berlin-Schöneberg, 10.22 -11.26. 1995. See also catalogue.

⁵ Wolfgang Kraushaar writes pointedly about the atmosphere in the 1960s: "Everybody who has grown up in the post-war period and became politicized anytime during the sixties, knows how hermetic the political repressing of National-socialism functioned. Home and school, university and science, justice and administration, state and industry, church,... the societal institutions as a whole stood noticeably under the consequences of a latent connection, whose absorbed strength was experienced as a silent menace" (Unless otherwise noted, all the translations in this article are by the authors). Wolfgang Kraushaar, "Autoritärer Staat und Antiautoritäre Bewegung: Zum Organisationsreferat von Rudi Dutschke und Hans-Jürgen Krahl auf der 22. Delegiertenkonferenz des SDS in Frankfurt (Sept. 4 – 8, 1967)." In: Wolfgang Kraushaar, ed. Frankfurter Schule und Studentenbewegung: Von der Flaschenpost zum Molotowcocktail, 1945 bis 1995 (Hamburg, Frankfurt am Main: Rogner & Bernhard bei Zweitausendeins, 1998), vol. 3, 16.

years"). The outrage about the long-held taboo subject matter concerning the involvement of the parent-generation as perpetrators or tacit supporters was vented in universities. In the home too the parents
 30 were more and more intensely confronted with questions regarding their behaviour during the Nazi period. One of the most well known literary accomplishments coming out of this background is *Die Reise* by Bernhard Vesper.⁶

This mixture of critical revision of the up to then celebrated tradition and a decisive will to participate in the association's politics led to the formation of an opposition within the Association for Visual Arts
 35 and ultimately to the dissolving of the old association and the forming of two new ones. The grass-roots (basisdemokratisch) NGBK, which was a product of informed individuals who oriented themselves on the student movement, has since then understood itself as a political art association which looks at art within its societal context, and questions the "functions of the visual arts in our society."⁷ Contrary to the prevailing practice of the mostly conservative museum-world to limit exhibitions to the presentation of artworks
 40 and artist-biographies, the NGBK presented the works together with other testimonies and documents of the time.⁸

In this sense the NGBK dealt in many exhibitions with German fascism, taking on an initially marginal position within the art-world. In correspondence with the dominant approaches to fascism-theories within the left camp, the catalogue essays investigated the economic prerequisites and structural conditions for fascism. Even though the racist and eliminatory politics of the NSDAP (Nazi party) and its followers were of course never ignored, the focus of the investigations was on the repressive character of German fascism towards the left during the Weimar Republic, corresponding to the state of the debate within the left. The widespread anti-Semitism among the Germans and the nearly opposition-free readiness to take part in the final solution and the industrial mass murder (later known as Holocaust) played a
 45 rather peripheral role.⁹ In the political rhetoric Auschwitz was looked upon as a synonym for the exterminatory policies of the Nazis. The politically correct enumeration of the victims led only rarely to an investigation of the various victim groups. Symptomatic of this is that Raul Hilberg's systematic and fundamental investigation *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* (The Destruction of the European Jews) was published in Germany in 1982 in a small left publishing house, a full 21(!) years after the American edition. An
 50 expanded edition by a major German publisher came out in 1990.¹⁰ Complex reasons, a thorough discussion of which would lead us too far astray, are responsible for the fact that research has only in the 1980s seriously occupied itself with Holocaust scholarship.¹¹ One reason for the delay is that many surviving

⁶ Bernhard Vesper, *Die Reise* (Berlin and Schlechterwegen: März Verlag, 1977).

⁷ This was the title of the second exhibition of the NGBK in January 1971, "Funktionen der bildenden Kunst in unserer Gesellschaft." The first exhibition presented the work of John Heartfield, whose political photomontages during this time-period was taboo in the West. This was the first Heartfield exhibition with historical and sociological comments.

⁸ See NGBK, 21 - was nun? Zwei Jahrzehnte Neue Gesellschaft für bildende Kunst (Berlin: NGBK, 1989), 23-46.

⁹ See Christopher Browning, "Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Bataillon 101 and the Final Solution in Poland. (New York: Harper-Collins, 1992). Also see Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996).

¹⁰ Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961). *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* (Berlin: Olle & Wolter, 1982). *Die Vernichtung der europäischen Juden* 3 Bd. (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 1990).

¹¹ "The events of the Holocaust entered the public consciousness only with the Eichmann-trial and the Einsatzgruppen-trial in Ulm during the early sixties. But it then took nearly another two decades until the German historical scholarship turned towards the history of the Holocaust, a subject matter that up to that time had been left mostly to foreign Jewish historians and scientists." Hans

perpetrators and accomplices, but also bystanders in influential positions, prevented a discussion, not wanting to be reminded of their involvement. Beate Klarsfeld chose a radical method to bring attention to this issue: In 1968 at the CDU party conference she gave the then chancellor Kurt-Georg Kiesinger a slap in the face, in order to "make the German youth aware of Kiesinger's Nazi past."¹² However, for understandable reasons also the victims tried to forget, which in the U.S.A. too turned the Holocaust into a mostly taboo subject matter.

65 *"Considering the increasingly nonchalant way that the memory of the Holocaust is now being summoned in the United States, it is striking to recall that in the first decade and a half after World War II, the destruction of Europe's Jews was a subject shrouded in taboo and seldom discussed in public or in print."*¹³

In 1987 the NGBK exhibited fascist documents, films, design and art, in an attempt to investigate the productions of the Nazi-state, in order to deal with the "Imaginary Fascination of Fascism." Here the centre of focus was not the repression, the splitting of the working class and the elimination of its associations, but rather the everyday life of the population under the swastika. This led to criticism on the part of traditional antifascist organizations. The introduction of the accompanying catalogue featured an explanation by the project group:

75 *"Capitalism-Fascism, this is not only the connection between Hugenberg, IG Farben and Auschwitz. It also consists of the experiences of community, of happy sensuality and accomplished collective change, elements that German fascism knew how to exploit. The point is that Germany for most Germans was not a concentration camp. Just a few years ago the approach of this exhibition would have been criticized as minimizing and palliative, by those who term themselves antifascists. In the mean-time things have changed. Questions about the everyday of the Third Reich, about the subjective side of the system, about the tolerating of the system, about the approval and enthusiasm, have not only become admissible, but absolutely necessary. And when one traces these experiences, one discovers the eerie connection between violence and desires, wishes and fantasies, which the fascist system managed to capture and stage in pseudo-real fulfillment."*¹⁴

Mommsen, "Erinnerung und Selbstverständnis," in Die Woche, (6./7. February 1999). (Abridged version of a speech given by Mommsen at the Stiftung Topographie des Terrors in Berlin, on February 3, 1999 in Berlin). Quote in the original: "Die Geschehnisse des Holocaust traten erst mit dem Eichmann-Prozess und dem Ulmer Einsatzgruppenprozess Anfang der 60er Jahre in das öffentliche Bewusstsein. Es dauerte jedoch noch beinahe zwei Jahrzehnte, bis sich die historische Forschung in Deutschland unmittelbar der Geschichte des Holocaust zuwandte, deren Bearbeitung sie bis dahin überwiegend ausländischen Wissenschaftlern überlassen hatte."

¹² See Peter Reichel, Politik der Erinnerung: Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995), 311. Chancellor Kiesinger had become member of the NSDAP in 1933 (!) and worked for the Nazi Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels.

¹³ Gabriel Schoenfeld, "Death Camps as Kitsch," in New York Times, March 12, 1999.

¹⁴ Quote in the original: "Kapitalismus-Faschismus, das ist nicht nur der Zusammenhang von Hugenberg, IG Farben und Auschwitz. Das sind auch die Erfahrungen unmittelbarer Gemeinschaftlichkeit, glückhafter Sinnlichkeit und gelingender kollektiver Veränderung, deren Trümmer sich anzueignen und auszubeuten der deutsche Faschismus so folgenreich verstanden hatte. Ein KZ war Deutschland für die meisten Deutschen eben nicht. Vor wenigen Jahren noch wären Fragen, die hier ansetzen - zumindestens unter denen, die sich als Antifaschisten begriffen - als verharmlosend, beschönigend qualifiziert worden. Inzwischen hat sich etwas verändert, Fragen auch nach dem Alltag des Dritten Reiches, auch den subjektiven Seiten des Systems, der Duldung, der Zustimmung, der Begeisterung, sind nicht nur zulässig, sondern notwendig geworden. Und wo diesem Alltag, den Erfahrungen nachgespürt wird, entdeckt man eine unheimlichen Zusammenhang von Gewalt und Wünschen, Sehnsüchten und Phantasien, die das faschistische System einzufangen und deren realimaginäre Erfüllung es zu inszenieren vermochte." NGBK, Inszenierung der Macht: Ästhetische Faszination im Faschismus (Berlin: Dirk Nishen Verlag, 1987), 7. The attempt of a man from the conservative camp one year later to bring light into the taboo darkness seems like an irony of history. His contribution was marked by an attempt to convey an understanding of how the consent and benevolent passivity toward fascism and its racist politics (in regard to Jews, Sinti and Roma, Homosexuals, mentally retarded, handicapped and political enemies) could take place. This is the famous and scandalous speech by the CDU member of parliament Philipp Jenninger, given on occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Reichspogromnacht (the Nazis called it "Kristallnacht") on the November 8, 1988. It was the first time that a leading functionary of the German Federal Republic dared to talk of a broad approval and of the anti-Semitism that existed even before Hitler. Jenninger's failure to clearly differentiate in his speech between quotes and his own position, in addition to his attempts to understand the anti-Semitic attitude

85 **Reception of the Lurie- and NO!art Exhibitions 1995 in Berlin**

Bearing in mind the above-mentioned history of the NGBK, it should not be surprising that its members in 1994 decided by a large majority to show a retrospective of artworks that very provocatively dealt with among other things the Holocaust, differing distinctly from the conventional way this subject matter was treated in art. An additional consideration was the fact that in 1995 many official events commemorated the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz (January 27, 1945) and the liberation from fascism (May 8, 1945: capitulation of the German armed forces and thus victory of the allies over Nazi Germany).¹⁵ Even though the exhibitions "NO!art" and "Boris Lurie" were not officially declared as such, they were for the NGBK a contribution to the memorable year 1995.¹⁶

A discussion of the critical reception of both the NO!art and Lurie exhibitions in Berlin 1995 will underscore the problems these works cause for many critics and the public at large.

Andreas Quappe in a 1995 exhibition review dismissed Lurie as skill-less and untalented.¹⁷ This criticism is not new, for it recalls Heinz Ohff's assessment of the Lurie exhibition at the Galerie Block in 1973.¹⁸ Quappe uses *Railroad Collage* as evidence of Lurie's antipathy towards women. He also implies that Lurie displays disrespect towards the horror that was the Holocaust. Instead of going into a discussion of what the NO!art collages and assemblages might be saying about capitalism's complicity in the Holocaust, Quappe simply dismisses NO!art as an attempt by untalented artists to "shove" it ("es der amerikanischen Mittelklasse zeigen") to the American middle class.¹⁹ It is useful to note here that already in 1966 Lucy Lippard in her book on Pop Art described the NO!artists as hot-blooded and lacking the necessary concentration needed to be great artists.²⁰ According to that line of argument the Pop artists are thus celebrated as great artists not because of their complicity with the marketplace and the art-world, but because they are level-headed and skilful.

during the Nazi-period, led to his downfall. He saw himself forced to resign on the very same day. Parallel to the changed research-interests in scholarship and within the left, conservative and right historians and journalists tried to relativize Auschwitz, which was reinterpreted as a response to the Soviet gulags. The debate, which was initiated mainly by the Berlin historian Ernst Nolte, became part of West-German history and was given the name "Historikerstreit." At first, this tendency possessed no hegemony, but it laid the basis for a nationalism which would develop after German unification. See the discussion concerning Botho Strauss's text "Anschwellender Bocksgesang" in *Der Spiegel*, February 8, 1993. This and other texts with similarly conservative and neonationalistic approaches are reprinted in *Die Selbstbewusste Nation* (Frankfurt am Main, Berlin: Ullstein, 1994), eds. Heimo Schwilk and Ulrich Schacht

¹⁵ Whether the broader public conceived this day as liberation or as defeat would be worth investigating. The antifascist camp of course always spoke of a liberation through the allies. There is a lot of proof that large parts of the population (the antifascist camp played a rather marginal role) perceived the May 8th as a defeat and "disgrace." Nevertheless, the term "liberation," previously used in DDR jargon, became part of conservative circles in the 1980s. It seems likely that this was an attempt to join the side of the victorious allies (the Western allies of course). Thereby one distanced oneself from the "evil" that made Auschwitz possible. This too is the attempt to identify oneself with the victims, this being a comfortable way of not having to deal with the perpetrators. See also Jane Kramer, "Die Politik der Erinnerung," in *Unter Deutschen: Briefe aus einem kleinen Land in Europa*. (Berlin: Edition Tiamat, 1996), 7-60.

¹⁶ One must add that the NGBK in their occupation with German fascism and its consequences did not orient itself on anniversaries or commemorative dates, as is the case with the annual rituals of political parties and state-representatives. Moreover, the NGBK had already in March of the same year remembered the mass murder committed by the Germans by hosting the exhibition "Stumme Zeugen: In the Camps" (Silent Witnesses: In the Camps) of photographs by Erich Hartmann.

¹⁷ Andreas Quappe, "Leerlauf der Entlarvung: Boris Lurie und andere NO!art-Künstler in der NGBK," in *Der Tagesspiegel Berlin*, (November 4, 1995).

¹⁸ For a reprint of Ohff's article "Aus dem Neinzeitalter: No-art Bilder von Boris Lurie in der Galerie Block," see NO!art, eds. Boris Lurie and Seymour Krim (Cologne: Edition Hundertmark, 1988), 39.

¹⁹ The tendency to call "skillless" what one does not understand is as old as the avant-garde itself. It is the same criticism often launched against Dada collages.

²⁰ Lucy Lippard, ed. *Pop Art*. (New York: 1966), 102-103.

Even Harald Fricke, a more sympathetic critic, accuses Lurie of exploiting the female body in his collages.²¹ This means that for Fricke the socio-critical potential of Lurie's work is immediately negated by the supposed misogyny. Another way to slyly disqualify NO!art as an important art movement in its own right is to deny it any originality. Gunnar Reski for example claims that the collages of the NO!artists in principle do not go beyond the works of such "predecessors" as Höch and Heartfield.²²

The focusing on the supposed un-aesthetic nature of NO!art, its assumed misogyny and on its lack of originality thus turns into an alibi for most critics, explaining why they do not feel the need to seriously discuss its socio-critical implications. This brief discussion of representative responses makes it clear why the majority of critics were not willing to discuss the 1995 NO!art and Lurie exhibitions at the NGBK as counter-occasions to the official celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II.

Another aspect of NO!art's reception in Germany is the way contemporary alternative groups or galleries found correspondences in both strategy and method. Klaus Theuerkauf showed Lurie-prints in the Endart gallery during the same time that both the Lurie exhibition and the NO!art exhibition took place. Endart, with which Theuerkauf is associated, was a collective, which used collage-effects to attack and criticize for example the Catholic Church and the presence of nuclear weapons in Germany. Although during its heyday (1982-1988), the Endart collective was not familiar with NO!art, Theuerkauf does see similarities in their strategies and socio-critical goals.²³ NO!art and Lurie thus become affiliated with Endart à posteriori (i.e. after the fact).

Some critics looked at what it meant to have NO!art exhibitions at NGBK. Gabriele Werner for example pointed out that the NGBK is not dependent on "curatorial committees" ("Kuratorische Gremien"), which the "art palaces" ("Kunstpaläste") usually have to deal with.²⁴ In a similar vein Gunnar Reski discussed the NGBK as a good site for the NO!art and Lurie exhibitions, because it is a "grass-roots (realbasisdemokratische) art association with an outwardly open programming structure."²⁵

The following statement by Boris Lurie indicates why he saw a special significance in having his major 1995 retrospective taking place in Germany: "One can foresee that Germany will become the focal point of philosophical and political arguments. The Germans stand closer than the Americans to the memory of war and violence, the source and motor of this art movement."²⁶ Lurie is thus placing importance on the need for Germans to consider their violent past. His works however refuse to follow any socially prescribed function of memory. As survivor of the Holocaust he literally embodies the memory with which he will be psychologically confronted all his life. He does not give himself the assignment to artistically express in a representative fashion the terror and extermination. His images rely on his subjective fund of experiences. He conveys his aesthetic and political positions in a very individual form. The

²¹ Harald Fricke, "Anti-faschistischer Anti-Pop," Taz Berlin, (2. November 1995).

²² Gunnar Reski, "NO!art," Texte zur Kunst, (March 1996): 171-172.

²³ See "Man Kann mit dem Pinsel Niemanden Töten," interview with Klaus Theuerkauf, in Tageszeitung, (November 2, 1995).

²⁴ Gabriele Werner, "Zitadelle für Idealisten," Junge Welt, (13. November 1995).

²⁵ Gunnar Reski, "NO!art," Texte zur Kunst, (March 1996): 171-172. Quote in the original: "[NGBK ist ein] realbasisdemokratischer Kunstverein mit nach aussen offener Programmstruktur."

²⁶ Boris Lurie interviewed by Christina Wendenburg in "Bis zur Schmerzgrenze," Tip Berlin Magazin 24 (1995). Quote in the original: "Man kann voraussehen, dass gerade Deutschland zum Brennpunkt philosophischer und politischer Auseinandersetzungen wird, und immer noch stehen den Deutschen die Erinnerung an Krieg und Gewalt, die als Ursprung und Motor diese Kunstbewegung antreibt, näher als den Amerikanern."

extremely aggressive contrasts and confrontations within his works lead to great irritation especially in
140 Germany, which by means of a self-prescribed national mourning seizes upon the murdered victims. The
supposedly pornographic and filthy nature of the works and their aesthetic power disturb the ceremony of
the solemn and self-righteous national memorial service. In the following section we will take a closer look
at how the Holocaust has been dealt with and commemorated within the public realm in Germany.

145 **The "Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe"**

In the last two decades many artistic works were created that dealt with and commemorated the
deportation and extermination of human beings committed by the German National Socialist State. Es-
pecially in the area of memorials artistic works were used more frequently. Such monuments can be seen
in many cities, their function (especially in the view of the political administration) is often limited to proof
150 that the "darkest chapter" of German history is not forgotten. Out of this context arose, next to several
successful examples, many questionable works, leading to an increasingly intensive discussion concern-
ing the fundamental function and possibility of such art within the urban environment.

Since 1988 the association "Perspektive für Berlin" is fighting for a "Denkmal für die ermordeten
Juden Europas" (Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe) in Berlin. The idea to erect a memorial ex-
155 clusively for the Jewish victims originated with the journalist Lea Rosh and the historian Eberhard Jäckel.
Despite initially large-scale criticism against the exclusion of other victim groups and the resulting hierar-
chization, this memorial concept received ever-greater support from the political and cultural spheres.²⁷
Konrad Schuller explained the reason the project gained such support: "Support grew also among those
who wanted to cast a new and more reconciliatory light upon German history. This support rested on the
160 realization that a memorial for the murdered Jews might be necessary, in order to return to the commu-
nity-building strength of history."²⁸ After the unification of Germany the support took on such concrete
form that in 1993 the chancellor made a site south of the Brandenburg Gate available for the memorial,
and on the 18. April of the following year, the artistic contest was written out. Here is not the space to
trace the various proposals and the development of the debate and the errors and confusions of its vari-
165 ous stages. Only so much: after a total of two contests the German parliament (Bundestag) decided on
25. June 1999 for the modified design by Peter Eisenman, who envisions the erection of a field of 2700
concrete pillars in addition to an information-centre. Contrary to the original intention of having an addi-
tional building house the information-centre, the trustees of the "foundation for the creation of a memorial
for the murdered Jews of Europe" decided in July 2000 for a subterranean site of information.²⁹ In that
170 summer, Eisenman supposedly had another idea: to make the pillars hollow on the inside and to illumi-

²⁷ See the position of Julius Schoeps, the director of the Moses-Mendelsohn centre for Jewish studies in Potsdam, who on the July 14, 1995 spoke in a Tageszeitung (TAZ) against the division of the dead into "memorable and not-memorable victims."

²⁸ Konrad Schuller, "Reise zum Mittelpunkt der Diskurse. Am Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas trifft sich eine Koalition deutscher Gegensätze," in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (January 22, 2000). Quote in the Original: "Auch unter denen, die jenseits der düsteren Nachkriegsperspektiven ein neues, versöhnlicheres Licht auf die deutsche Geschichte werfen wollten, wuchs Unterstützung. Sie beruhte auf der Erkenntnis, dass ein Denkmal der ermordeten Juden nötig sein könnte, um von hier aus die Rückkehr zur gemeinschaftsstiftenden Kraft der Geschichte gegen den Vorwurf revisionistischer Schönfärberei verteidigen zu können."

²⁹ See "Das Wort des Architekten," in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (8. July 2000).

nate them from the interior, "so that they emit a warm and amber glow."³⁰ This proposal, whose realization is very unlikely, would lead to complete banality and kitsch, and does not deserve any additional comment.

175 Solidarity with the victims is the comfortable solution for the surviving perpetrators and their descendants. Instead of documenting the hundred-thousand-fold involvement of Germans as offenders,³¹ the grief that is truly felt by only a few people in Germany, is turned into a lie on the level of a national declaration. Author Manfred Zach describes in his novel "Die Bewerbung" this blending of perpetrators and victims:

180 *"Nobody in Germany wanted to be reminded of the tertium imperium after it went up in smoke and flames. Everything was smoke, smoke from crematories, and smoke from ruins. A giant collective smoke-sacrifice, after whose burnout the people who lighted the fire joined the victims who they only recently had treated like animals. The indistinguishable ashes of the dead as catharsis for the living: what an elegant way to leave the disgusting event behind! How simple, how perfect, how fatefully definite."*³²

185 The fall of the wall and the following German reunification on October 3, 1990, eliminated for good one consequence of the allied victory over Hitler's fascism: the division of Germany. The chapter of the post-war order, defined by the cold war, is irrevocably concluded, and a reinvigorated Germany is striving for a position comparable to other "superpowers" on the International parquet. The German journalist Hermann L. Gremliza wrote in 1995:

190 *"On 30. June 1995 Germany declared its third war in this century. Since the 30th June 1995 the German military is allowed to conduct in all theatres of war (air, water and land) what for 50 years seemed even for a war minister unimaginable: it can conduct war outside of the region of alliance and also there where the Wehrmacht had wreaked havoc. As coincidence wants it, this third war is again against Serbs. This leads to the thought: When what yesterday seemed unimaginable*
195 *has become reality today, what is to be impossible tomorrow?"*³³

200 In the summer of 1999, the Bundeswehr (armed forces), in union with NATO, belonged to the winners of an undeclared war against Yugoslavia. Joseph Fischer's (foreign minister of Germany and member of the Green party) statement "never again war-never again Auschwitz" was explicitly used as an argument for military action against Yugoslavia, even though at first one barely spoke of war but rather of a humanitarian effort. The *Tageszeitung* (TAZ) (July 24/ 25, 1999) wrote about the visit of chancellor Schröder (SPD) in Kosovo on the 23. July 1999: "In front of German soldiers he claimed that the deployment of Federal armed forces is suited to 'if not make one forget about the historical crimes of the Wehrmacht [Nazi armed

³⁰ See "Mässig seriös. Was kostet das Gedenken? Ein Gespräch mit Reinhard Rürup," in Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (September 25, 2000). Quote in the original: "... so dass sie ein 'warmes, bernsteinfarbenes Licht' ausstrahlen."

³¹ The idea to record the names of all perpetrators was the journalist Klaus Theweleit's way to criticize the winning design of the first contest: a monumental funerary slab which would feature the names of all known Jewish victims of the Holocaust. See NGBK (ed.) *Der Wettbewerb für das Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas: Eine Streitschrift* (Berlin: NGBK, 1995), 160.

³² Quote in the original: "Niemand in Deutschland wollte noch an das tertium imperium erinnert werden, nachdem es in Rauch und Flammen aufgegangen war. Alles sollte Rauch gewesen sein, Rauch aus Krematorien, aus Trümmern. Ein riesiges kollektives Rauchopfer, an dessen Verglühen sich die Anzünder in Leidensgefährtschaft mit den Opfern, die sie kurz vorher noch für Tiere gehalten hatten, begaben. Die ununterscheidbare Asche der Toten als Katharsis der Lebenden: Welch elegante Art, das widerwärtige Geschehen hinter sich zu lassen! Wie leicht, wie perfekt, wie schicksalhaft endgültig." Manfred Zach, *Die Bewerbung: Ein Roman* (Tübingen: Klöpfer & Meyer, 1999), 95.

³³ Hermann L. Gremliza, "Wir kneten ein KZ," in *Konkret* 8 (August 1995): 9. Quote in the original: "Am 30. Juni 1995 hat Deutschland den Krieg erklärt, seinen dritten in diesem Jahrhundert. Seit dem 30. Juni 1995 darf deutsches Militär zu Luft, zu Wasser und zu Land, was fünfzig Jahre lang selbst einem Kriegsminister unvorstellbar galt: ausserhalb des Bündnisgebietes und auch dort, wo die Wehrmacht gewütet hat, Krieg führen. Wie es der Zufall will, der in der Geschichte der deutschen Kriege so segensreich waltet, geht es beim dritten Mal zum dritten Mal gegen Serben. Aber umso besser: Wenn das noch gestern Unvorstellbare heute Wirklichkeit IST, was sollte morgen unmöglich sein?"

forces], then at least to give people an image of Germany as peaceful." These words suggest that the goal of this politics is cathartic. This begs the question whether this too is part of the instrumentalization of Auschwitz that Martin Walser spoke about during his extremely controversial peace prize-speech in the Fall of 1998.

One can suspect that the acknowledgement of its history between 1933 and 1945 is used by Germany in order to present itself to the world as "normalized," proving that the unified country is now reformed and can take part in world politics according to the motto "learning from the past." It is within this context that the "Memorial for the murdered Jews of Europe" gains particular significance. With this memorial the "un-laudable" chapter of Germany, the bureaucratically organized and industrially executed mass murder, is finally to be laid to rest by being set in concrete. Once again, Hermann L. Gremliza, writing in 1995:

*"Among the writers, thinkers, and other journalists within this unified nation, the declaration of war went into one ear and out the other. With decent seriousness they engage in the dispute surrounding the planned Holocaust Memorial. The way they conduct the debate explains why they could not perceive the most recent declaration of war as such: They cut off the connection between the German present and recent German history, thereby finally mastering the German past."*³⁴

Before this, in 1993, Karl Friedrich Schinkel's redesigned Neue Wache,³⁵ situated in the former GDR (German Democratic Republic), was dedicated on the national day of mourning (Volkstrauertag, 14. November) as "central memorial of the Federal Republic of Germany" for the commemoration of the "victims of war and tyranny" by the chancellor in the presence of other distinguished representatives from state and society. The dedication took place in the presence of Ignaz Bubis, the chairman of the Central Council of Jews (Zentralrat der Juden). Many Germans, among them even representatives of the Bundestag, convey an anti-Semitic attitude by suggesting that Bubis should deal with Israeli issues, instead of meddling in German matters.³⁶ Bubis joined the dedication-festivities only after chancellor Kohl promised that land would be given for a memorial commemorating exclusively the victims of the Holocaust. The Neue Wache is adorned by an enlarged version of the sculpture *Pieta* by Käthe Kollwitz, who was a declared pacifist and KPD-supporter, and whose works were banned by the Nazis from museums as degenerate art. Here one can now commemorate the fallen soldiers of the Waffen-SS (SS bataillon) as well as their murdered victims. Thus, a kind of "squaring of a circle" was accomplished. Publisher and Hannah Arendt translator Eike Geisel discussed in an article about the Holocaust memorial its connection to the Neue Wache:

³⁴ Ibid. 9. Quote in the original: "Den Dichtern und Denkern und anderen Journalisten der vereinten Nation ist die Kriegserklärung zum einen Ohr hinein- und zum anderen hinausgegangen. Sie geben sich mit allem sittlichen Ernst dem Streit um das geplante Holocaust-Mahnmal in Berlin hin, und wie sie ihn führen, erklärt, warum sie die jüngste Kriegserklärung nicht als die dritte wahrnehmen konnten: Sie haben die Verbindung der deutschen Gegenwart zur jüngeren deutschen Geschichte abgeschnitten, die deutsche Vergangenheit endlich bewältigt."

³⁵ The Neue Wache was redesigned in 1931 according to plans by Heinrich Tessenow into a Prussian memorial for the German soldiers who perished in the world war. In the GDR the Neue Wache was twice given a new character: In 1960 it was restored under the influence of Tessenow's plans and was declared to be a "Memorial for the victims of fascism and the two world wars." In 1969, for the 20th anniversary of the GDR, the Neue Wache was once again reconfigured, this time according to plans by Lothar Kwasnitza, turning it into a "Memorial of the GDR for the victims of fascism and militarism." See Peter Reichel, *Politik der Erinnerung: Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit* (Munich and Vienna: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1995), 231 ff.

³⁶ See Axel Hacke, "Das Gewicht der Wahrhaftigkeit (Ein Porträt Ignaz Bubis)" in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (July 9, 1999), 3.

235 *"Why are the Jews not complaining about this theft of their memory? They are the living exhibit in a land, which needs no national Holocaust-Museum, because it is one They are now paying to Lea Rosh the price for the present which they gave the chancellor. In the Neuen Wache the victims have let themselves be blended with the perpetrators. Now they have to accept being clung on to by the winner."*³⁷

240 Chancellor Gerhard Schröder, elected in 1998, sees the Holocaust Memorial as an opportunity to show the world that Germany wants to "come clean."³⁸ Stefanie Endlich, working with the "Stiftung Topographie des Terror" in 1995, explained that monuments do not tell us much about the past they are supposed to commemorate, but they say a lot about the times and society that puts them up.³⁹ In a similar vein, Eike Geisel recognized the self-serving purpose of such a memorial to the Holocaust and called the idea behind it "collective self therapy."⁴⁰ Another potent term within this context is "pathos of exoneration" ("Entlastungspathos") coined by the journalist Walter Grasskamp.⁴¹ Several critics of the proposed Holocaust Memorial have argued that there is a danger that once a monument of some kind is set up, the thinking and reflecting about the problem will stop. Prof. Moshe Zimmermann from the Hebrew university in Jerusalem put it this way: "It is to be feared that the active engagement with memory ("Erinnerungsarbeit") will

245 end once an ostentatious memorial is set up....There are many sites in Germany that convey a much more direct message, such as Bergen-Belsen or Buchenwald."⁴²

Examples of Frequently Cited Art in the Context of Holocaust Remembrance

255 So far we tried to briefly describe aspects of the intellectual and political climate of Germany in the 1980s and 90s, the previous section having focused on the official and ceremonial usage of the past. In the following section we want to investigate the art that direct or indirectly deals with the Holocaust, in order to discover its differences to the art of Boris Lurie. Because the Holocaust (i.e. genocide of the European Jews) was taboo for such a long time, as mentioned above, many works coming to the atten-

260 tion of the art-interested public dealt with the problematic of remembrance and memory (artistic memorials and monuments as well as artworks in exhibitions). Artists to name in this context are Christian Boltanski, Gunter Demnig, Jochen Gerz (also in co-operation with his wife Esther Shalev-Gerz), Hans Haacke, Rudolf Herz, Horst Hoheisel, Reinhard Matz, Beate Passow, Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock.

³⁷ Eike Geisel, "Die Fähigkeit zu mauern," in Konkret 5 (1995), 48. Quote in the original: "Und warum melden sich die Juden nicht zu Wort gegen diesen Diebstahl ihrer Erinnerung? Sie sind die lebenden Ausstellungsstücke in einem Land, das kein nationales Holocaust-Museum braucht, weil es selbst eines ist. ... Sie zahlen nun an Lea Rosh den Preis für das Geschenk, das sie dem Kanzler gemacht haben. In der Neuen Wache haben sich die Opfer den Tätern beimengen lassen. Jetzt müssen sie die Umklammerung durch den Sieger hinnehmen."

³⁸ Since the publication Daniel Goldhagen's Hitler's Willing Executioners in 1996 there has been a lot of discussion concerning the general German complicity in the Holocaust. The reason the German public has embraced the book is that Goldhagen argues that the Germans today have completely shed their anti-Semitism and their xenophobia. Thus, although Goldhagen has increased awareness of the perpetrators of the Holocaust, he has done so at the cost of discussing seriously the dangers of today's xenophobia.

³⁹ Quoted in Der Wettbewerb für das "Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas": Eine Streitschrift (Berlin: Verlag der Kunst, neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst, 1995), 37.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁴¹ Walter Grasskamp, "Die Behaglichkeit des Gedenkens," Die Zeit (November 18, 1994).

⁴² Quotation is taken from an article in Der Spiegel (August 24, 1998). Quote in the original: "Es ist zu befürchten, dass die aktive Erinnerungsarbeit mit einem pompösen Mahnmal an ihr Ende gelangt. Steht erst mal das Denkmal, ist das Denken schnell am Ende. Damit ist die Sache dann gelaufen. ... Es gibt in Deutschland viele Orte mit einer viel direkteren Botschaft, wie Bergen-Belsen oder Buchenwald."

265 Boltanski deals in his impressive somber and archive-like installations with the legacies and the remaining traces of wiped out existences. Death is in Boltanski's works the point of departure for his exploration of life, for the present without past is unthinkable. Thereby he stresses fundamentally that his art is not an art that "has the Holocaust as a theme or explains it, but rather it is art which explains itself because the Holocaust existed. It is an art that follows it."⁴³

270 As early as 1972 Jochen Gerz engaged himself (in the large installation "*Exit"-Materialien zum Dachau-Projekt*) with the traces of museum-language and museum-pedagogy that visitors to the Dachau memorial are confronted with. Here the politics of remembrance and memory becomes the theme itself. The focus of attention is not on what is handed down, but on the how. The authentic site is covered with present-day instructions and commentaries, which like a plastic film puts itself between the history of the authentic site and the visitor.⁴⁴

275 With a similar emphasis on the impact of the present on the sites, Reinhard Matz conducted a photographic journey to the former concentration- and extermination-camps, publishing the result in 1993 under the programmatic title *Die unsichtbaren Lager: Das Verschwinden der Vergangenheit im Gedenken* (The invisible camps: the disappearance of the past within remembrance).⁴⁵ At this point we also want to mention Rudolf Herz whose work, to put it short and to the point, deals with the ideological construction of history and its elimination. In his nine-part work *Museumsbilder* (1986)⁴⁶ he shows with help of carefully chosen photographic enlargements the wanton violations that the visitors of Dachau commit upon images of the perpetrators. Here too we are dealing with memory, but it is a memory that in the helpless act of aggression comes close to being an attempt to overcome history. It is as if the resistance that so horribly failed in fascist Germany was suddenly dared against "innocent" images.

285 At this point mention should be made of a project on which Matz and Herz collaborated. Their 1997 proposal for the "Mahnmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas" (Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe) was an attempt to ensure an active engagement with memory. Their idea was to pave one kilometre of the German Autobahn with cobblestones. The motorists would be forced to slow down from 130 km/hour to 30 km/hour. A large road-sign would announce the paved kilometre as "Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe." Matz and Herz suggested to sell the piece of land in Berlin designated for the Memorial and to set up a foundation with the money which would aid persecuted minorities. An important aspect of this project is that it can not be seized for political purposes, for it could host no exonerative rituals. The idea of the paved kilometre is a provocation, for it connects a symbol of Germany's progress and efficiency (Autobahn) with the Holocaust.⁴⁷

⁴³ "Der Clown als schlechter Prediger," Interview with Christian Boltanski by Doris von Drateln, in catalogue to the exhibition in the Hamburg Kunsthalle, Christian Boltanski: Inventar (Hamburg: Hamburger Kunsthalle, 1991), 61-76.

⁴⁴ See Armin Zweite comment on Gerz's work in catalogue, Eckhard Gillen (MD), eds., *Deutschlandbilder: Kunst aus einem geteilten Land*, (Cologne: DuMont Buchverlag, 1997), 442-444.

⁴⁵ Reinhard Matz, *Die unsichtbaren Lager: Das Verschwinden der Vergangenheit im Gedenken*. (Reinbeck bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1993).

⁴⁶ See *Deutschlandbilder: Kunst aus einem geteilten Land*, 478f.

⁴⁷ See Rudolf Herz/Reinhard Matz, "Überschrieben: Mahnmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas." Brochure published by the artists in 1997.

295 Gunter Demnig tracks down history on the spot by inserting stones into the pavement in front of houses formerly inhabited by Jews. The stones bear inscriptions that refer to the crimes committed by the Nazis. With a coloured line extending through downtown Cologne, he marked the exact route on which 1000 Roma and Sinti in 1940 were marched to the holding-camp, proving that segregation, deportation and extermination began not in secret, but in public.

300 In 1993 Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock put up a much-admired monument in the so-called Bayerischen Viertel (Bavarian Quarter) in Schöneberg, a Berlin district in which at the beginning of the 1930s over 16000 Jews lived, 6069 of whom were killed in the Holocaust. A total of 80 small enamel plaques were placed on lampposts, each listing one of the anti-Semitic orders of the Nazi state. On the back of each plaque one could see a naive and context-related image rendered in the style of a children's
305 illustration. In a very unassuming way this documented the slowly progressing and unopposed segregating of the Jews. Through the game of contrast between the childlike banality of the images and the terrorist content of the anti-Semite bureaucracy, the contradictory relationship between appearance and fact is demonstrated to the viewer, without any transparent moralizing.⁴⁸ Renata Stih and Frieder Schnock also participated in the contest for the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin with a conceptual design that drew largely
310 positive attention. "Bus Stop"(the name of the project) envisioned a bus terminal from which bright red busses would drive to authentic sites of extermination, such as Buchenwald. The conceivers of this idea purposely undermined the competition's stipulations.⁴⁹

Horst Hoheisel succeeded in Kassel to impressively commemorate a structure that had fallen victim to fascist iconoclasm in 1939, while at the same time conveying a sensory idea of what was de-
315 stroyed. He sunk a reverted negative-form of a fountain donated by the Jewish entrepreneur Sigmund Aschrott into the ground. The visitors can walk on the fountain's basis, but must recreate the sensory appearance of the original for themselves. This is not the conventional act of restoring a monument by a history-effacing reconstruction, but it is rather the aesthetically successful visualization of history and the traces of destruction. Horst Hoheisel and the other above-mentioned individuals belong to a new genera-
320 tion of artists that occupies itself with the function of memorials and asks the question "whether the monument itself is more an impediment than an incitement to public memory."⁵⁰

Hans Haacke, as invited artist to the cultural festival "Steirischen Herbst" 1988 in Graz, confronted this city, which on the 25. July 1938 had received from Hitler the honorary title "City of the People's Insurrection," with its not so laudable past. He draped the Mariensäule (a column bearing a sculpture of the Virgin Mary) in red fabric emblazoned with a swastika and the inscription "Und ihr habt doch
325 gesiegt!" (you have won after all), turning it into an obelisk, the same way the Nazis had done in 1938. The only difference from 1938 was that Haacke, using the *fractura* typeface preferred by the Nazis, listed the victims of the "Insurrection." In addition he confronted the citizens of Graz with posters and facsimiles

⁴⁸ See Kunstamt Schöneberg et al. *Orte des Erinnerns: Das Denkmal im Bayerischen Viertel* vol. 1 (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994).

⁴⁹ See Ute Heimrod, Günter Schlusche and Horst Seferens (eds.), *Der Denkmalstreit - Das Denkmal? Die Debatte um das 'Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas': Eine Dokumentation* (Berlin: Philo Verlag, 1999), 286.

⁵⁰ Quote by James Young, see James Young (ed.), *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (Munich: Prestel Verlag, 1994), 35.

of anti-Semitic documents from the Nazi period. The provocation was so powerful that somebody fire-
bombed the installation.⁵¹

For several years now Beate Passow has been photographing the forearms of Auschwitz survivors, presenting the photographs in various ways under the titles "Mengenleere" or "Nenner/Zähler." The trace of the past in form of the tattooed number from Auschwitz is here the information that the viewer recognizes, apart from the trace of the present indicated by the natural patina of old age (spots on the skin, wrinkles, etc.) and the codes of fashion (jewellery, clothes). By means of the surviving victims, this work thematizes equally the existence and disappearance of history. In another work Beate Passow presented the clothing of a KZ-inmate inside a glass case in downtown Munich, in the typical style of a fashion-store window display. This act, whose provocative tension is created by the brutal confrontation between sales-increasing window displays and the suppressed memory of the victims, touches upon the theme of memory, but also comments on contemporary tendencies of historical revisionism and neo-fascism.

Boris Lurie: Wolf Vostell --- not included

Finally, we want to discuss an artist who so far has been left out of the large representative exhibitions. The painter Blalla W. Hallmann, who died in 1997 at the age of 56, engaged himself in many examples of his figurative oeuvre with Hitler and fascism. His drastic and provocative paintings, which often push the threshold of pain and disgust, combine "pornographic" elements with seemingly preposterous historical fabrications. But when taking a closer look one notices that these historical fabrications convey a quite real picture of the existing continuities, both in terms of ideology and personnel. Hallmann's resigned conviction of the world's inalterability, and his in the end extremely pessimistic view of history, bring his work into the vicinity of the great apocalyptic visionaries of painting. To say it with a title by Hallmann: "As the old sang, so twitter the young" (*Wie die Alten sungen, so zwitschern auch die Jungen*).

Hallmann engaged himself in a 1981 painting with the myth of ignorance concerning the Nazi atrocities committed in concentration- and extermination-camps. The painting shows a KZ-scene and is called *Bild im trostlosen 'modernen' Stil: Nichts hören, nichts sagen, nichts sehen, nichts riechen* (Painting in the desolate 'modern' style: hear nothing, say nothing, see nothing, smell nothing). Hallmann, who one might call a moralist in the positive sense, perceived with acerbic accuracy the crimes of political systems, churches and state against man. However, he also always acknowledged the "voluntary" submission and obedience, including the opportunism of the dependants and oppressed, taking out of all this the stuff his dark worldview is made of. Hallmann had sworn off all isms and had lost all hope that reason might prevail in politics and history.

In reaction to the increasing popularity of neo-nazi groups and acceptance of parts of national socialist politics extending all the way into the ranks of the FDP and the FPÖ, Hallmann began to paint the so-called "Schwarze Serie" (black series) at the end of the eighties. The "Schwarze Serie" was also a reaction to the lust for sensationalism that led both the rainbow press and parts of the more serious publi-

⁵¹ See Hans Haacke, "Und ihr habt doch gesiegt, 1988" in James Young (ed.), *The Art of Memory: Holocaust Memorials in History* (Munich: Prestel, 1994), 77-81.

365 cations to focus on the private life of Adolf Hitler. These large paintings expressed the ecstatic image of Hitler during the Nazi period, as well as the enthusiasm and erotic appeal Hitler has on many people. Often Hallmann saw himself accused of pornography, which in several cases led to censorship, preventing a broad reception of his work. In that respect the work of Blalla W. Hallmann occupies a rather marginal position within the German art-world.

370 **Boris Lurie: Immermann (??) (Immendorff d.R.) ... (Art and Politics, Museum shows etc.)**
Sam Goodman -- !! ... Wolf Vostell!! ... Dietmar Kirves!! ignored.

Documents and Signs of the Holocaust in the Work of Boris Lurie

375 Boris Lurie's visual oeuvre contains in many forms narrative as well as symbolic references to the Holocaust. The first paintings in which Lurie processed his experiences in the concentration camps were figurative images well within the tradition of narrative paintings by survivors. Examples are *Entrance* (1946/47) and *Back from Work* (1946/47).⁵² In *Entrance* Lurie depicts a situation he spoke about. KZ inmates were forced as punishment to position themselves as guards at the entrances to the barracks. In imitation of guardian soldiers, they had to carry buckets instead of helmets on their heads and they were
380 "armed" with birch-brooms and were thereby again degraded and exposed to ridicule.

Boris Lurie: No prisoners ridiculed them. ... They were soviet war invalids, in a special barrack for them in Stutthof starved, invalidated and sick....

In his later works, from the fifties onwards, he turns to large paintings and dedicates himself to the *Dismembered Women*. In a certain way these works, in which he depicts women's bodies bizarrely assembled and deformed, could be related to the Holocaust. Boris Lurie lost his grandmother, mother and
385 one of his sisters; they were murdered by the Nazis or Lettish collaborators. The loss of important female role models and the radical incision into the developmental phase from juvenile to grown-up caused by ghettoization and KZ-internment must here be taken into account. Such a situation impeded the condition for the experience of love and sexuality to the point of making it impossible. This all must be considered in
390 connection with the *Dismembered Women*.

Boris Lurie: Absolute wrong! Was a development of war events plus human and sexual situation in New York/America.

Here already, as also in later works, Lurie is criticizing the socially accepted reduction of the woman to the body and thence to sexuality and eroticism. One must only image the situation of the back
395 then young artist, in order to understand the ambivalence of this strategy which consisted for one of an accusation against the public treatment of women and in the second place a longing for the sexual. After the agony in the concentration camps and forced labour (together with his father Ilja Lurie) at the armaments factory Polte-Werke AG in Magdeburg (a satellite camp of the KZ Buchenwald), the liberation finally took place in May 1945. After a short service for the military security service of the U.S. army (CIC),
400 Boris Lurie and his father emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1946 to join Boris's sister Assya, who had escaped to

⁵² See catalogue to the exhibition at the NGBK (Neue Gesellschaft für Bildende Kunst) NO!art (Berlin: NGBK, 1995), page 97 and page 120.

Italy before the Holocaust and in 1946 was living in New York City with her husband Dino Russi. They shared the fate of thousands of emigrants. Of course such radically changed living conditions at first led to isolation and loneliness, which was increased by the sorrow over the murdered relatives. At the end of the fifties Boris Lurie began his multi-media works, in which painting, assemblage and photographs were combined into one composition. In this phase works come into being that still today, almost 40 years later, provoke the strongest reactions, for they confront with merciless frankness sexual obsessions with photographic testimonies of the Nazi mass murder.

Boris Lurie: Here already, as also in later works, Lurie is ~~criticizing the socially accepted~~ **(reacting against the)** reduction of the woman (**woman's**) ~~to the body and thence to sexuality and eroticism (commerce and teasing)~~. One must only image(*ine*) the situation of the back then young artist, in order to understand the ambivalence of this strategy which **the social role women condescended to play and their public treatment of men---** consisted for one of an accusation against the ~~public treatment of women~~ and in the second place **longing for the sexual**. After the agony in the concentration camps and forced labour (together with his father Ilja Lurie) at the armaments factory Polte-Werke AG in Magdeburg (a satellite camp of the KZ Buchenwald), the liberation finally took place in May 1945. After a short service for the military security service of the U.S. army (CIC), Boris Lurie and his father emigrated to the U.S.A. in 1946 **to join my sister Assya, who had escaped to Italy before the Holocaust and in 1946 was living in New York City with her husband Dino Russi. Spoke English perfectly! That's why I worked for US army as interpreter I spoke English and German.** They shared the fate of thousands of emigrants. Of course such radically changed living conditions at first led to isolation and loneliness, which was increased by the sorrow over the murdered relatives. At the end of the fifties Boris Lurie began his multi-media works, in which painting, assemblage and photographs were combined into one composition. In this phase works come into being that still today, almost 40 years later, provoke the strongest reactions, for they confront with merciless frankness sexual obsessions **--and of American life--** with photographic testimonies of the Nazi mass murder.

The Israeli art historian Ziva Amishai-Maisel describes in her essay "Art Confronts the Holocaust" the misgivings of intellectuals at the beginning of the 1960s, the time when the works here discussed were made, in regard to the artistic engagement with this thematic complex:

"Art and the Holocaust are concepts that seem to be mutually exclusive; they belong to two entirely different spheres, which appear to be separated by an unbridgeable gap. Art has aesthetic rules and strives for beauty and personal expression. It thus seems powerless before the horror and cruelty of the Holocaust in which six million people were slaughtered in ways that can only arouse feelings of disgust and revulsion. Theoreticians have questioned whether it is worthwhile attempting to bridge the chasm: do not the documentary photographs that were taken at the time fulfill the need for visual testimony? Will the artists be able to compete with these black-and-white images, which exert such a powerful impact on the spectator? Should the artist attempt to evoke the sense of deep shock that a spectator feels before a pile of skeletal corp from Buchenwald and Dachau? Thinkers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Theodor W. Adorno came to the conclusion that it is neither possible nor warranted for them to do so."⁵³

⁵³ Ziva Amishai-Maisels, "Art Confronts the Holocaust," In: Monica Bohm-Duchen, ed., After Auschwitz: Responses to the Holocaust in Contemporary Art (London: Lund Humphries Pub. Ltd., 1995) catalogue, p. 49.

Boris Lurie: Man könnte hier sagen, daß Adorno (?) schrieb: Es kann mehr keine (regelrechte) Poesie geben – nach Auschwitz. In truth, the age-old and „Modern art” esthetic strategisms are not valid any longer after these and like occurrences. But a certain art, coming from “the gut”, and disregarding – if need be “academic” esthetic niceties, can address itself to all subjects. “Art” isn’t dead, but certain art definitively is.

445 It needs saying here that both Adorno and Sartre clung to an artistic and aesthetic-concept that in the meantime (at least in terms of contemporary art) turned out to be completely untenable. This is indicated by the fact that many poems, paintings and literary works have given expression to the horror, on whatever level of abstraction. We want to refer to Paul Celan's poem "Todesfuge" (1945), upon which Theodor
450 W. Adorno ignited the question whether one could still write lyric poetry after Auschwitz. This quarrel has long since been decided in favour of poetry and art in general. "Todesfuge" has become an irreplaceable part of the canon of unchallenged and recognized poetry. Given the above-quoted misgivings it is easy to imagine the aggressive rejection and the subsequent almost total disregard for Lurie's works in the sixties.⁵⁴ In these works documentary photos of the Holocaust, which by now have become "icons," serving
455 as testimony of unbelievable brutality and mass murder, are surrounded by photos taken from pornographic magazines of the time. An example of this is Lurie's *Saturation Painting* from 1959-1964, which uses the photo of KZ-inmates behind barbed wire, taken in 1945 by Margaret Bourke-White. With this concept Lurie negates the principle that separates low from high, voluptuous life from mass murder, life from death, sexual obsession from the moral seriousness of history and its victims.

460 **Boris Lurie:** It shows, where in the end, suffering and hope actually leads—to the behind of a pin-up girl.

Brian O'Doherty has a point when he assessed the concept of NO!art as a forerunner for the Underground.

465 *“(T)he nature their protest took was a kind of vernacular itself. A vernacular drawing on vernacular as it were, using poster-like directness, atrocity photos, pinups (the obverse of Miss America)...So their art might be seen as a hand-made-pre-underground press, and as an early manifestation of the radicalism of the late sixties.”⁵⁵*

The bourgeois's indignation against these attacks on the eye, a reaction of course calculated by Lurie, proves on closer examination to be hypocritical. Lurie is merely intensifying the concept behind the capitalist print-media to an unbearable degree by heightening the contrasts, uncovering the politics of the
470 media within a system whose profit-maximization forces profitable advertisements into close proximity to information. Lee Miller's illustrated news-report about the liberation of the concentration camp Dachau and the horrifying legacy left behind by the Nazis appeared in the June issue of the U.S. edition of Vogue under the title "Believe It!"

475 *“Vogue made room for her photographs, however the publication of these disturbing photos marked no fundamental change in the magazine's layout. The same issue was filled with traditional articles, such as "The Psyche of the Pigtail," "The Imperial Evening Gown," and "4 black parts + 4 white parts = 16 costumes." Particular bad taste is evidenced by the fact that Lee*

⁵⁴ See Brian O'Doherty, "Introduction," in Boris Lurie, Seymour Krim, Armin Hundertmark, eds., NO!art: Pin-ups, Excrement, Protest, Jew-art (Berlin, Cologne: Edition Hundertmark, 1988), 17-18.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

480 *Miller's report, which also contained photos of charred KZ-inmates, was followed by an article about Californian barbecue.*⁵⁶

Other illustrated magazines and periodicals that relied on income from publicity, such as Life, published similar documentary reports surrounded by advertisements for cosmetics, fashion and other products. Lurie uses of such documents and photos for a comprehensive critique of a system that despises human beings and produces such crimes. Nevertheless, the criticism is not limited to fascism but is broadened to include crimes of other nations. The governments of Great Britain, the U.S.A. and other western democracies hesitated for a long time to join the (Soviet-inspired) Anti-Hitler coalition, not wanting to believe early reports about the horrors in Auschwitz and other camps, one of which was delivered in 1942/1943 by Jan Karski, the courier of the Polish underground.⁵⁷

490 **Boris Lurie: Timely historically incorrect! Even earlier, British Intelligence intercepted radio-messages between SS-Einsatzkommandos – in 1941 (which was only revealed recently).**

Appeals from Jews to bomb the railroad tracks leading to Auschwitz were ignored. Of course Boris Lurie knew **[Boris Lurie: lived]** these historical events, having lived through them. The swastika as well as the star of David surface in many of his paintings/collages, often next to contemporary press reports or headlines, thus combining historical aspects with contemporary accounts of oppression and murder.

Lurie's work differs from most of the above described artworks in that it goes far beyond the problematic of memory. He implements insignia of power (swastika) and of oppression (star of David) in a contemporary comprehensive critique of the capitalist system. Important for the context of NO!art in the sixties is also the all-powerful presence of the cold-war atmosphere, which had only shortly after the end of World War II turned allies into bitter enemies. It is well known that many former Nazis had forged contacts with the U.S.A. even before the end of the war. All the rocket scientists associated with Wernher von Braun, some of them provided with new identities, bypassing all guidelines for the arrest of war criminals, which inevitably would have led to charges in front of the Nuremberg military tribunal, were smuggled from Buchenwald-Dora, the manufacturing location of the V-1 and V-2 rockets, to Huntsville in the U.S.A., **[Boris Lurie: ... from Buchenwald-Dora ... where the V-1 and V-2 rockets were manufactured ...]** where they continued their research under new masters. The necessary experiments, which later for example led to the development of the space suite worn by John Glenn during his orbit around the earth, were carried out on KZ inmates **[Boris Lurie: who mostly perished]**.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Mary Daniel Hobson, "Ästhetik des Schreckens," in *Apropos Lee Miller* (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag Neue Kritik, 1995), 131-132. Mary Daniel Hobson refers to the report "Believe It!" by Lee Miller, published in *Vogue* (June 1945), 105. Quote in the original: "Vogue schaffte Platz für Ihre Aufnahmen, und dennoch markierte die Veröffentlichung dieser beunruhigenden Photos keine grundlegende Veränderung in der Ausrichtung der Zeitung. Dieselbe Ausgabe war voller traditioneller Artikel: 'Die Psyche der Haarknotenfrisur,' 'Das imperiale Abendkleid' und '4 schwarze Teile + 4 weisse Teile = 16 Kostüme.' Von besonderes schlechtem Geschmack zeugt die Tatsache, dass sich Lee Millers Reportage, die auch Bilder von verkohlten KZ-Häftlingen enthielt, ein Artikel über Kalifornisches Barbecue anschloss."

⁵⁷ See E. Thomas Woods, M. Jankowski, *Jan Karski-Einer gegen den Holocaust: Als Kurier in geheimer Mission* (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1997).

⁵⁸ See Tom Bower, *Verschöpfung Paperclip: NS-Wissenschaftler im Dienst der Siegermächte* (Munich: Paul List Verlag, 1988).

Reactions of Press and Public to the Boris Lurie Exhibition in the Buchenwald Commemorative Site

515 Let us now turn to a discussion of how the Buchenwald concentration camp commemorative site (located on the outskirts of Weimar) attempted through an exhibition of Lurie's work (December 1998 to May 1999) to confront the visitors with an alternative method to engage oneself with memory. The reception of this work exemplifies its defiance to be easily classified according to conventional categories of memory.

520 Weimar presented itself in 1999 as the "Cultural City of Europe," and as part of this celebration, three official exhibitions were meant to reflect the cultural legacy of Weimar in the 20th century. Early 20th century modern art was given the best location, being exhibited at the Schlossmuseum, while art of the Nazi-era and art of the East German Republic (a.k.a. German Democratic Republic, GDR) were relegated to the "Gauforum," an assembly hall built by the Nazis and converted into a factory by the communist
525 government after the war.

David Galloway described the display of the Nazi art in Weimar: "The canvases themselves are crowded together on temporary chipboard walls, as though relegated to a storeroom for museum castoffs. The anti-esthetic of the presentation and the technically versed but vapid canvases mutely underscore Hannah Arendt's theory of the 'banality of evil.'"⁵⁹ A similar display is used for the art of the former GDR:
530 "Industrial scaffolding, draped in plastic, has been used to create a vast rotunda in the Gauforum, where some 500 paintings jostle for space...(T)here is considerably more individuality than in the show of Nazi art -at times, indeed, a certain experimental flair, even if the overall impression is one of triumphant mediocrity."⁶⁰ The way art historian and curator Achim Preiss hung the exhibition caused controversy, many artists and viewers feeling that the West was here simply denigrating the memory of the GDR as a whole,
535 by among other things, presenting its art in close proximity to Nazi art. Several East German artists sued the organizers of the exhibition over the display of their paintings.⁶¹ It is obvious that both Nazi and East German art was used to prop up early 20th century modernist art as a high-point of 20th century creativity. The hanging of the modernist works (including Kandinsky, Klee and Feininger) at the Schlossmuseum emphasized the aura of the individual work and invited contemplation, while the hanging of both Nazi art
540 and GDR paintings encouraged an impression of banality. Contemporary art was represented by the Neues Museum, whose recent renovation was made possible by the donation of a large part of the gallerist Paul Maenz's collection. This collection contains works by Americans such as Pop artist Andy Warhol, but also works by Germans such as Anselm Kiefer. Within the context of the three official exhibitions (early 20th century modern art, Nazi art, GDR art) the works in the Neues Museum demonstrated that the
545 "torch" of modern art has been passed on and is alive and well in Weimar.

See also Rainer Einfeld, "Fortschritt durch Vernichtung: Raketenpioniere und KZ-Häftlinge im NS-Staat," in Yves Béon, Planet Dora: Als Gefangener im Schatten der V-2 Rakete (Gerlingen: Bleicher Verlag, 1999), 277-298.

⁵⁹ David Galloway, "New Light on Weimar," *Art in America* (July 1999), 39.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁶¹ The lawsuit of the artist Ellena Olsen brought an erstwhile decree (Verfügung) into effect. See "Verfehlt Folie?" in *Der Spiegel* (June 21, 1999), 211.

Boris Lurie: -- And how "great indeed is the majority of celebrated contemporary market – oriented art? Is dominating by "market-forces" really that much removed from Nazi or Socialist-Realist art, in essence of its subservience? Contemporary "avant-gardes" have also been actively promoted by governments -- not only markets (see Abstract-Expressionism and Pop-art ...)

550 The Lurie exhibition at the Buchenwald commemorative site was in the majority ignored by critics, for Lurie's work does not fit into the simple categories of "good and bad" required to present Weimar as the "cultural city of Europe" within a unified Germany that has cast off all mantles of dictatorship (i.e. fascism and communism). Rudij Bergman described the Lurie-exhibition in Buchenwald as "an artistic-political counterblow" to the celebration of Weimar as "cultural capital" in 1999.⁶² This is a valid point in so far as that the director of the Buchenwald commemorative site, Dr. Volkhard Knigge, wanted to emphasize Buchenwald as an un-erasable part of Weimar's history. The nearness of the concentration camp to Weimar, the city of German Classicism and Enlightenment (Goethe and Schiller), makes the relationship between the humanist-intellectual tradition and terror so highly controversial.

560 Because Weimar and Buchenwald are located in what used to be East Germany, it is useful in this context to take a closer look at the way the GDR dealt with the Holocaust and xenophobia.

Even though in the former GDR antifascism was from the beginning considered to be state doctrine, there was a xenophobic attitude, which however manifested itself only rarely because it was repressed by the state. The GDR understood itself as the better Germany, taking on the heritage of resistance and of the labour movement that had been oppressed by fascism. This view was accurate in terms of the many members of the government, the state apparatus and the societal nomenclature, who had spent time in concentration camps or had gone into exile. But a large part of the population had not resisted the Nazis, instead most cheered them and had even been active party-members. A considerably more active persecution of Nazi crimes on the part of the GDR justice-system, which led to about twice as many sentences than in the FRG (Federal Republic of Germany), and the above-mentioned foundation-myth, led to a different confrontation with fascism. Many publications dealt with resistance, antifascism and the victims, whereby the extraordinary role of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust were nearly completely ignored. The persecuted and murdered Jews were often subsumed without further classification under the formula "victims of fascism." Jewish communists made an effort to dismiss the [Boris Lurie: their] Jewish origins.⁶³ It was only in the eighties that also in GDR scholarship more importance was given to the genocide of the European Jews.

From 1950 to 1989 the GDR government used Buchenwald as a memorial site for the "fight against fascism," turning it into a shrine for East Germany's "founding myth" ("Gründungsmythos"). Dr. Volkhard Knigge became director of the Buchenwald memorial site in 1994 and completely redesigned the former concentration camp, turning it from a myth into a historical museum. Having exhibited the art of

⁶² "[E]in künstlerisch-politischer Gegenschlag, der sich nicht um ästhetische Feinsinnigkeiten schert, den der Ort der Kunst-Handlung, oberhalb Weimars gelegene Gedenkstätte des KZ Buchenwald, auch kaum zulassen würde." Rudij Bergmann, "Mit der Wut der Verzweiflung," Frankfurter Rundschau (January 9, 1999), 8.

⁶³ See author unknown, "Judentum- mehr als eine Klassenfrage. Erstes grosses Treffen von Juden aus der DDR und der BRD in Ost-Berlin. Diskussion über die deutsche Geschichte seit dem sogenannten November-Pogrom" in Die Tageszeitung (TAZ) (November 9, 1988).

580 former inmates before, the Lurie exhibition (December 1998-May 1999) fit within Knigge's idea concern-
ing Buchenwald's role as educational and museal institution within the unified Germany. The museal as-
pect of the site is illustrated by the fact that the former disinfection-building in which works of former in-
mates are shown, and in whose basement the Lurie exhibit took place, was renamed Kunstmuseum (art
585 museum). But the Buchenwald commemorative site engenders different expectations than the Neue Ge-
sellschaft für Bildende Kunst in Berlin (NGBK). Buchenwald is set up foremost as an educational institu-
tion, the visitors knowing that they are entering the authentic site of a former concentration camp. The
NGBK on the other hand presents itself as an alternative art space, visitors accordingly expect the exhib-
ited art to be challenging and difficult.

The following discussion of several entries of the guest-book for the Lurie exhibition at Buchen-
590 wald will clarify the visitor's expectations and reactions to Lurie's collages.⁶⁴ Several visitors expressed
the following view: "This exhibition here in the basement is extremely distasteful."⁶⁵ Another member of
the public responded: "Whoever mentions the term 'distasteful,' should read the texts about the artist and
try to understand."⁶⁶ Others though expressed difficulties with the texts that accompanied the exhibition: "I
would have appreciated more understandable explanations with the artworks."⁶⁷ A brochure given to visi-
595 tors makes the point that if art that is to remind us of National-Socialist crimes should be like a knife in a
wound, then Lurie's work fits the bill like no other.⁶⁸ But most people writing comments in the guest-book
did not read the collages in socio-critical terms, but rather saw them as deriding the victims: "This type of
art is a mockery of the victims. It is symptomatic of this decadent society in which we live. Did the artist or
artists only have commercial success on their mind? In capitalism everything turns into merchandise,
600 even the suffering of human beings. Ugh!"⁶⁹ Interestingly enough, Lurie's work is here accused of being
symptomatic for the decadent capitalist system. As discussed above, he was actually trying to shock the
viewer into acknowledging this society's obscenity. It seems that this particular viewer did not need Lurie
to point out the vulgarity of consumer culture. Sabine Brandt's exhibition-review relates Lurie's collages
to the way contemporary media displays both sex and crime in an attempt to increase sales: "Boris Lurie
605 could point the finger as much as he wanted to, it did not help anything. So called 'infotainment' is still
practised, the method of showing a little bit of everything, be it sex and crime, or images of war and ad-
vertisements."⁷⁰

⁶⁴ The authors extend their thanks to Dr. Sonja Staar and Dr. Volkhard Knigge at the Buchenwald commemorative site for allowing them access to the guest-book.

⁶⁵ Comment by family S., dated February 27, 1999: "Diese Ausstellung hier im Keller ist äusserst geschmacklos!"

⁶⁶ Comment by D.P., dated February 27, 1999: "Wer von 'geschmacklos' spricht, sollte auch die Text über den Künstler lesen und zu verstehen versuchen."

⁶⁷ Comment by J.W., dated March 6, 1999: "Ich hätte die Kunstwerke gern mit verständlicherer Erklärung."

⁶⁸ "Wenn das ebenfalls schon zum Stereotyp verkommene Wort, dass Kunst, die an die nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen erinnern wolle, wie ein Messer in der Wunde zu sein habe, überhaupt noch Sinn macht, dann im Fall der Arbeiten von Boris Lurie." From the brochure for the exhibition at the Buchenwald commemorative site "Boris Lurie: Works 1946-1998" from December 13, 1998 to 10. May 1999.

⁶⁹ Comment by K., dated December 22, 1998: "Diese Art der Kunst kommt einer Verhöhnung der Opfer gleich. Ist symptomatisch für diese dekadente Gesellschaft in der wir jetzt leben. Hatte(n) der/die 'Künstler' wohl nur den Kommerz im Sinn? Im Kapitalismus wird bekanntlich alles zur Ware, auch das Leid der Menschen. Pfui!"

⁷⁰ Sabine Brandt, "NO!art: Kunst die sich verweigert," TLZ (December 12, 1998). Quote in original: "Boris Lurie mochte anprangern, so viel er wollte -geholfen hat es nichts. Nach wie vor versteht man es bestens, sogenanntes Infotainment zu zelebrieren, von allem ein bisschen zu zeigen, sex and crime, Kriegsbilder und Bauspar-Reklame auf eine Ebene zu heben, wenigstens innerhalb eines Mediums." See also the article by Matthias Reichelt, which contrasts the complexity and simultaneity of Lurie's collages to

Boris Lurie: ... A propos, Boris Lurie did this work long before the birth of "infotainment" – from the late 50's on.

610 A major problem that visitors to the Lurie exhibition had is that he does not fit the conventional notion of victim. They are not comfortable with facing work by an "angry Jew." Similarly to the criticism we encountered in the 1995 Berlin exhibitions, the visitors by and large dismissed the need to explore the socio-political implications of the work by calling it "distasteful." Dr. Sonja Staar, curator at the commemorative site Buchenwald, described how several visitors did react more positively after taking part in guided
615 tours and discussions: "We led guided tours through the exhibition. The experience was that for the visitors the knowledge about the biographical starting point of the collages was very important. In discussions they reacted attentively and sympathetic to explanations and suggestions. Once one made clear to the visitors what kind of tensions and personal hardship led to these images, they found a connection to them."⁷¹

620 Most of the comments in the guest-book do not relate to the Lurie-exhibition directly, but are extremely revealing nonetheless, for they say volumes about expectations and about how Germans deal with the Holocaust. In the comments relating to the experience of the Buchenwald commemorative site as a whole, one comes across words such as: moving (bewegend), touching (ergreifend), shocking (erschütternd), etc. Many visitors have a very emotional experience, some receiving a kind of pleasure from this
625 cleansing undertaking: "I found it very moving, once I even had to cry. To sum up: It was cool."⁷² This latter statement might have been meant ironically, but it still conveys the notion that the experience of a former concentration camp is expected to have a cathartic effect. Lea Rosh (the head of the private initiative to create a memorial for the Jewish victims of the Holocaust) wanted to evoke such an emotional experience with the memorial. Boris Lurie's work and NO!art in general does not allow for this emotional
630 catharsis and atonement and thus leads to the accusation that it tries to denigrate the victims of the Holocaust.

The following statement by the director, Dr. Knigge, emphasizes the goals he set for the Buchenwald commemorative site: "We care about history here, not about arousing and exploiting emotions. That was the task before, to use- and often misuse-emotions We're not just seeking to create tolerance -
635 which can imply indifference -but rather to build solidarity and fellow feeling."⁷³ But judging from the comments in the guest book, many come to Buchenwald in order have their emotions aroused. The following comment is most likely by an East German who misses the way the commemorative site, set up during the GDR regime, made him feel: "When I was here last, 20 years ago, I was deeply moved and touched for life. Today I can only note that typical West-German 'softy-crazies' are running the place. Look at the

conventional methods of remembrance. Matthias Reichelt, "Boris Lurie: Werke 1946-1998," *Kunstforum* 145 (May/June 1999): 391-394.

⁷¹ Dr. Sonja Staar, curator at the memorial site of Buchenwald in a letter to the authors from July 23, 1999. Quote in original: "Wir haben Führungen in der Ausstellung gemacht. Die Erfahrung damit war, dass das Wissen um den biographischen Ausgangspunkt der Collagen sehr wichtig war. In Gesprächen reagierten Besucher aufmerksam und mit viel Sympathie auf Erklärungen und Hinweise. Machte man Besuchern bewusst, welchen Spannungen diese Bilder ihre Existenz verdanken, fanden sie eine Beziehung zu ihnen." The Buchenwald commemorative site is continuing its tradition of showing works by former inmates with the exhibition "Leben-Terror-Geist. KZ Buchenwald: Porträts von Intellektuellen und Künstlern." (Life-Terror-Spirit. KZ Buchenwald: Portraits of Intellectuals and Artists). July 25 to October 20, 1999.

⁷² Comment by R.G., dated January 17, 1999: "Ich fand es sehr bewegend, einmal musste ich weinen. Kurz gesagt: Es war geil."

⁷³ Quoted in John Rodden, "Uses of the past: Versions of Buchenwald," *The Christian Century* (April 26, 1995), 458.

640 bald heads, they are also your fault! [Signed]: A shocked fellow citizen."⁷⁴ This is very telling, for it partially blames the West for the Nazi-skinheads (i.e. the bald heads) **[Boris Lurie: ... but the skin-heads truly only appeared after the demise of the East German socialist state]** and just like the controversy surrounding the hanging of the GDR exhibition in Weimar, it demonstrates the tensions that exist within the unified Germany.

645 Some visitors comment on the fact that the attitude that led to the Holocaust has not disappeared. Parallel to the culture of remembrance after the war, which we described above, was an increase of violence against foreigners and foreign-looking citizens, as well as infringements against Jewish facilities. This tendency increased after the fall of the wall in 1989 and the ensuing unification of the two Germanys. The point that Buchenwald is not a closed chapter, but instead should lead to a discussion of contemporary discrimination, is underscored by the following statement: "We were here today with our children, I
650 am the son a gypsy [who survived the camps]. Who cries and mourns for our sorrow? Today, the same mistakes are still made by the Germans, but our people are not numerous enough to yell loud enough for the world to take notice. We and our people suffered and still suffer under persecution and are still discriminated against."⁷⁵

655 The Lurie exhibition lasted until May 1999, thus into the beginning of the NATO bombing campaign in Yugoslavia. Several visitors drew parallels between the Holocaust and ethnic cleansing, others saw the bombing campaign as proof that the West has not learned from the past, but is still trying to solve problems through war.⁷⁶

In summary, one can say that within the context of the political-cultural situation in the U.S.A.,
660 Boris Lurie's work was in the first place provocative, radical and in the truest sense of the term sub-cultural. With elements full of ugliness, obscenity, filth, and allusions to menstrual blood and excrement (usage of hair glued with paint, plaster, cement), a counter-world to the "clean" official art-world was created. The art-world, to which Pop Art belonged, made use of the advertising- and product-aesthetic of capitalism. **[Boris Lurie: and pleurably wallowed in it]** The strategy of celebrated art to use the aesthetics
665 of the "beautiful" surface, despite partially serious **[Boris Lurie: penetrating]** subject matter, was purposefully avoided by NO!art. But it would not be enough to simply reduce this approach to a pubescent act that is satisfied with provocation. In fact all parallel and contradictory elements of life come **[Boris Lurie: with a shock – just as in life ---]** to bear within Lurie's work and lead into a hard realism that even for present-day eyes is difficult to take. The stimulus was attack and refusal without the offering of a positive

⁷⁴ Comment dated February 28, 1999: "Als ich vor 20 Jahren zuletzt hier war, hat mich das zutiefst beeindruckt und für mein Leben geprägt. Heute kann ich leider nur feststellen, dass sich hier typische westdeutsche Softy-Spinner betätigen. Schaut auf die Glatzen - sie sind auch euer Verschulden! Ein geschockter Mitbürger!"

⁷⁵ Comment by S.B., dated May 2, 1999: "Wir waren heute mit unseren Kindern hier, ich bin der Sohn eines überlebenden Zigeuners. Wer weint und trauert um unser Leid? Heute werden von den deutschen noch die gleichen Fehler gemacht, aber unser Volk ist zu klein um so laut zu brüllen dass die Welt auf uns aufmerksam wird. Wir und unser Volk litten und leiden noch heute unter Verfolgung und unser Volk wird noch Heute diskriminiert."

⁷⁶ It has been argued in discussions concerning the proposed Holocaust Memorial that the exclusion of the other victims, such as the Roma and Sinti, or the homosexuals, would make it difficult for the young people to see how the memorial connects to their own life. This is why Dr. Knigge and the directors of other sites of former concentration camps underscore the educational value and the importance of the sites as part of what Germans need to deal with. In March 1998 an open letter of protest was published, signed by several directors of commemorative sites, including Dr. Knigge. It protested the idea of adding an expensive information center to the proposed Holocaust Memorial. The letter pointed out that authentic sites such as Buchenwald already serve the educational function of an information centre and are strapped for money.

670 perspective. The insertion of imagery pertaining to the Holocaust is integrated into a contemporary critique of a Westernized capitalist system that [Boris Lurie: tries to usurp the] demands a leading role in world politics. In order to demonstrate the perverse excesses of such despicable politics, Boris Lurie assembles into his works photos and headlines about the Holocaust, the dropping of the atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki, as well as reports about wars started for imperial or colonial interests. Therefore, Lurie is neither interested in memory nor any heroization of victims and of sorrow. Rather, he is dealing with the signs and codes that are connected with Auschwitz as well as with all other genozides. Thus, these works withdraw themselves from the exclusive context of "art and Holocaust." The discussion of the reception of NO!art and the art of Boris Lurie in Germany in the 1990s showed the various ways that this art was dismissed, for most critics and viewers did not want to deal with its comprehensive and merciless critique of society. Unlike the proposed Holocaust Memorial, which constitutes an attempt for Germany to "heal" itself from the past by feigning solidarity with the victims, NO!art goes against all simplistic efforts of overcoming the past. Also, this art does not allow for the emotion-laden cathartic experience many people expect and want. We are dealing here with an all in all profoundly [Boris Lurie: truth-seeking art – not pessimistic art --] pessimistic art, one that is incapable of fitting within the context of a ritualized expression of mourning.

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