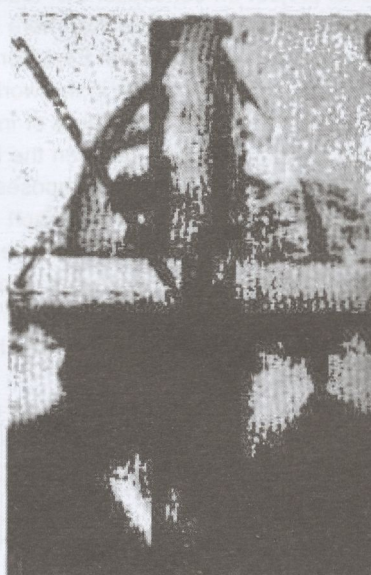
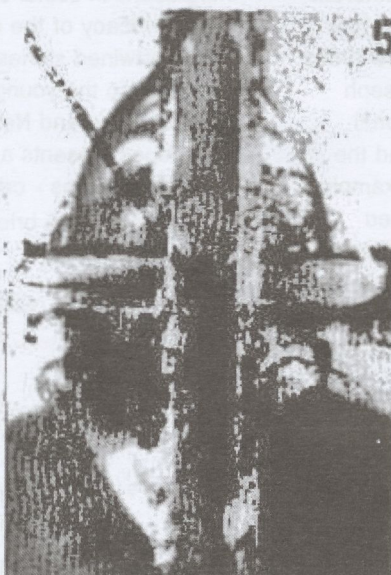
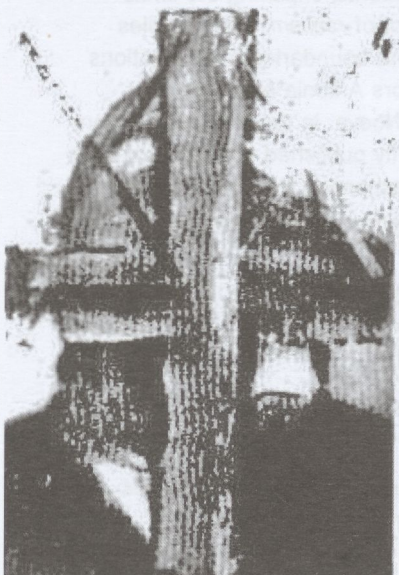
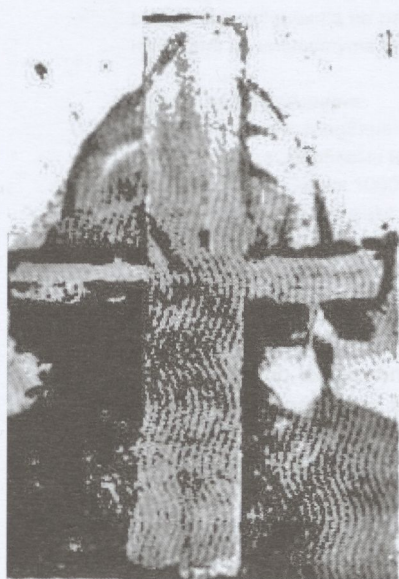


IX. Kunst- ausstellung der DDR



In search of true realism Eugen Blume and Erhard Monden with Joseph Beuys in the GDR¹

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IX. Kunstaussstellung der DDR,
exh. cat. Dresde, Albertinum
et Brühlsche Terrasse, Berlin,
Verband Bildende Künstler,
1982–1983

Image published in the art
magazine *Bildende Kunst*, N°4,
April 1982, with the caption
"Erhard Monden Zeit–Raum–Bild
Realisation 1980"

Image published in the
newspaper *Neue Zeit*, 5
August 1981, with the caption
"1-6 Erhard Monden, Acryl/
Latexfarben/Karton"

This paper explores how the young Kunstwissenschaftler (art historian and critic) Eugen Blume and his artist friend Erhard Monden, both of whom lived in East Berlin during the 1980s, recognised the continuation of true socialist realism in the work of Joseph Beuys. This encounter between artists from East and West offers the opportunity to revisit some aspects of the specificity of the debates surrounding the conceptions of realism in Europe's different artistic contexts during the Cold War.

Keywords: Realism, Cold War, Germany

Настоящата статия изследва как младият Ойген Блуме (Kunstwissenschaftler – изкуствовед и критик) и неговият приятел – художникът Ерхард Монден, които живеят в Източен Берлин през 80-те години на XX в., разпознават продължението на истинския социалистически реализъм в творчеството на Йозеф Бойс. Тази среща между художници от Изтока и Запада ни дава възможност да си припомним някои аспекти от спецификата на дебатите около представите за реализъм в различни артистични контексти в Европа по времето на Студената война.

Ключови думи: реализъм, Студена война, Германия

In the divided Europe of the Cold War, realism was the subject of fierce debate in the art worlds. When it was called socialist realism, it expressed the political doctrine variously deployed in all communist countries as well in the communist parties in capitalist countries, where it dominated the artistic creation. This intertwining of political and aesthetic issues was also very present in capitalist countries, where art and culture were utilized to represent the values of their system. In this context, realism could have been looked upon as antagonistic unless it differed sufficiently from its socialist expression not to arouse suspicion. The interdependencies between the two rival systems were thus tight and permeated the views on the art theoretical challenges faced by artists. Thus, many of the discourses on art during the years of the Cold War analysed artistic practices along variously explicit political lines. They outlined the place held by works of art within the characteristic divisions of the period that reflected the system of binary oppositions distinctive of the epistemology of modernity, but which were also emblematic of a conception of art as representation. This state of affairs was reflected by numerous events and publications, including the biennials in Venice and Paris, the poster exhibition in Warsaw, recurring exhibitions such as Documenta in Kassel in the FRG, the GDR art exhibition in Dresden, reviews, and the debates at the congresses of art critics and art historians organised by the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) and the International Committee of the History of Arts (CIHA). However, there were also other ways to consider art in both East and West that did not follow this mimetic tradition and questioned the relations that existed between artistic practices and reality within the multiplicity by which they are linked, thereby transforming how realism is to be understood. The encounters between Eastern and Western artistic practices in Europe can make this research particularly salient, and it is to one of them that the following pages are devoted. In this debate were involved also the FRG and the GDR, the two German states that

Notes:

¹ A first version of this article was published in Japanese in the book *Réalismes revisités. Croisements et entrecroisements de la notion de "Réalité" dans les arts*, (Ed. by Matsui, H.), Tokyo, Sangen-sha, 2023 (forthcoming).

- 2 Antoine, J.-P., Une expérience démocratique de l'art? De Marcel Duchamp à Joseph Beuys – In: Six rhapsodies froides sur le lieu, l'image et le souvenir, Paris, Desclée de Brouwer, 2002, 109.
- 3 Blume, E., Joseph Beuys und die DDR – der Einzelne als Politikum – In: Jenseits der Staatskultur. Traditionen autonomer Kunst in der DDR, (Ed. by Muschter, G. and Thomas, R.), Vienna, Carl Hanser Verlag, 1992, 137-154.
- 4 Kunstwissenschaft (science of art) is frequently used as quasi-synonymous of Kunstgeschichte (history of art). But in the GDR, there was a particular understanding of the discipline Kunstwissenschaft, gathering the history, criticism and pedagogy of art. The term with this background has no equivalent and therefore as is customary in texts dealing with the particular context of the GDR, the German terms Kunstwissenschaft and Kunstwissenschaftler will be retained to describe a theoretical approach to the subject of art and its representatives.
- 5 See Klaus Werner: für die Kunst (Ed. by Muschter, G.), exh. cat., Berlin, Galerie Parterre, Heck-Art-Galerie, Kunst für Chemnitz e.V., Cologne, König, 2009.
- 6 In an email of 12 March 2018, Eugen Blume recalled that, from the time of the retrospective held at the Guggenheim Museum in 1979, he worked from the first monograph on Beuys [Joseph Beuys, (Ed. by Adriani, G., Konertz, W. and Thomas, K., Cologne, DuMont-Schauberg, 1977)] and from another devoted to the subject of social sculpture [Soziale Plastik: Materialien zu Joseph Beuys, (Ed. by Harlan, V., Rappmann, R. and Schata, P., Achberg, Achberger Verl.-Anst., 1976)].
- 7 The original title is mentioned by Blume, E. in Joseph Beuys und die DDR – der Einzelne als Politikum, Op. cit., 137-154, note 17, 152: "Der Kunstbegriff bei Joseph Beuys. Bedeutung der Relevanzverschiebung vom künstlerischen Produkt zum "Prinzip Kunst" als besondere Produktionsweise". Humboldt University in Berlin has not kept its masters' theses, nor has Eugen Blume conserved a copy (notification by Blume in an email of 7 July 2020).
- 8 Peter H. Feist was a professor at Humboldt University in Berlin and president of the Kunstwissenschaft section in the association of visual artists in the GDR (Verband Bildender Künstler, abbreviated to VBK). This association brought together artists, art historians and art educationalists and organised the whole of artistic life and institutions in the GDR. In the late 1960s, Feist was actively involved in the third reform of higher education, which was decisive for the studies and organisation of the discipline and for the formation of the department at Humboldt University. The author of numerous articles and books on Marxist art studies, contemporary sculpture in the GDR and on Impressionism, Feist was not just a representative of the discipline in the GDR, but also internationally, as president of the East German section of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), as a member of the International Committee for Art History (CIHA), and authorised to make numerous trips outside of the socialist space. See Feist, P.H., Die Kunstwissenschaft in der DDR – Kunst und Politik, (Göttingen), Vol. 8, 2006, 13-49; Baier, C., '...befreite Kunstwissenschaft'. Die Jahre 1968 bis 1988" – In: In der Mitte Berlins. 200 Jahre Kunstgeschichte an der Humboldt-Universität, (Ed. by Bredekamp, H. and Labuda, A.S.), Berlin, Gebr. Mann Verlag, 2010, 373-390; Bernhardt, K., Kunstwissenschaft versus Kunstgeschichte? Die Geschichte der Kunstgeschichte in der DDR in den 1960er und 1970er Jahren als Forschungsgegenstand – Kunsttexte Ostblock, Vol. 4, 2015, 1-19.
- 9 Eugen Blume reports that Monden was particularly aware of Joseph Beuys' focus on reality and believed

emerged from World War II, paradigmatic examples of the division of Europe, and the debates that revolved around socialist realism and the thinking they prompted in favour of a "true realism". An exploration will then be made of how the pursuit of this realism by young artists and critics arose from a dialogue between Marx's thinking on art and the expanded concept of art (*erweiterter Kunstbegriff*) of Joseph Beuys (1921–1986), who, beginning in the early 1960s, by means of his artistic practice, his teaching at Düsseldorf Academy and his political commitment, "extended the recognition of art as a *creative act* to all areas of production and social exchange that gave rise to the famous statement: *Every human being is an artist*"².

From his first participation at Documenta in 1964, Joseph Beuys has been cited by the discourse on the art of the GDR as one of the artists whose creative production is representative of late capitalism, all fabricated by the market, and whose artistic value did not correspond to its equivalent in the socialist state. His name is mentioned alongside those involved with Pop Art, Fluxus and hyperrealism, confirming the close dialogue between the art of the FRG and the United States, and his work was very much at variance with that of the artists considered truly progressive who followed the discourse of the GDR's socialist realism. However, in East Berlin during the early 1980s, even though Beuys' works were not accessible in the GDR, the young *Kunstwissenschaft*³ student Eugen Blume (b. 1951) researched the artist in books and in interviews with Klaus Werner, director of the Arkade Gallery⁴ and the mediator of Beuys' expanded concept of art in the GDR⁵. Thus, Blume was able to write his master's thesis in *Kunstwissenschaft* at Humboldt University on "The Concept of Art in Beuys' Work". The impact of the shift in significance from the artistic product to the principle of art as a mode of individual production⁶, under the supervision of Peter H. Feist, one of the most prominent figures in this scientific discipline specific to the GDR, is that it applied the socialist state's political doctrine to the art world⁷.

For his part, Erhard Monden (b. 1947), an artist trained by Günter Hornig in Dresden, also in East Germany, believed that Joseph Beuys' social sculpture (*soziale Plastik*) embodied "true realism"⁸. How can this be understood in a context where realism was always understood to be socialist realism? It seems to be contradiction itself. On the one hand, the practices of Joseph Beuys were not generally associated with realism, and even less so with those in the GDR. Beuys did not see himself as being a part of capitalism and market society, nor of socialism as it was practised in the people's democracies, or in the ideological uses the two systems made of art, such as socialist realism⁹. On the other hand, whereas interpretations of socialist realism, which varied over time and location, included non-figurative forms, Beuys' performances and actions were never really favourably received¹⁰ and sometimes even treated as threats¹¹. In a socialist context, to describe Beuys's actions as "true realism" seems like a provocation on the part of the young generation known as the *hineingeboren* (literally "born inside") since they were born after 1948 in the newly constituted state of the GDR, which assessed the limits of socialism and its art worlds and saw the need for their transformation, without aspiring to the promises made by the capitalist states.

However, this juxtaposition of terms merits attention. In the context of the GDR, equating Beuys' social sculpture with "true realism" results in an unexpected and seemingly incompatible formula. It is something of an oxymoron, a figure of speech that unites two words with conflicting meanings, creating surprise, and the contradiction it encompasses touches on the inconceivable. Does this apparent contradiction not blur the spatial and theoretical boundaries that guarantee the division and opposition between Joseph Beuys' social sculpture, the fruit of Western capitalism, and the realism of Eastern socialist artists?

In the context of the GDR, this provocative proposal is also related to the verbal manipulations in which Joseph Beuys shared an interest with Marcel Duchamp, and which, as Jean-Philippe Antoine reminds us, "occupy the same plane as physical and spatial manipulations: they all define a *common figural space*"¹². They reconfigure the relations between subjects and objects, space and time, self and other, etc., such as they are usually conceived, and open up new perspectives. What ways of conceiving the artistic relations between East and West in Europe during the Cold War help us to understand this rapprochement between Joseph Beuys' social sculpture and realism? How do the very means of ephemeral action contribute to a particular deployment in space and time in order to blur geopolitical boundaries? What complex elaboration does the realism associated with Beuys' social sculpture stem from?

that his social sculpture embodied true realism, see Blume, E., Joseph Beuys und die DDR – der Einzelne als Politikum, Op. cit., 137-154, et id. – In: Gegenstimmen. Kunst in der DDR 1976–1989, exh. cat. Berlin, Martin Gropius Bau, 2016, 38. In a letter dated 12 March 2018, Eugen Blume recalled: "For us, Beuys was the only socialist realist, which we understood as an intellectual attitude and not as a question of form. We were interested in his proposals to use art to transform living conditions. In my master's thesis I talked about a shift in emphasis from the product to the mode of production. We were concerned with a form of being, an attitude, and in this sense with political questions. The GDR represented the Marxist conception that existence determined consciousness, Beuys challenged this and asserted an inner freedom, which leads to freedom with and against being".

10 Jochimsen, M., Beuys und Marx. Das einseitige Weltbild des Marx aus der Sicht von Beuys – In: Joseph Beuys-Tagung, (Ed. by Harlan, V., Koepplin, D. and Rudolf Velhagen, R.), Basel, 1–4 May 1991, Basel, Wiese Verlag, 1991, 246-253.

11 On this, see in particular Rehberg, K.S., Verkörperungs-Konkurrenzen. Aktionskunst in der DDR zwischen Revolte und 'Kristallisation' – In: Performance und Bild. Performance als Bild, (Ed. by Janecke C.), Berlin, Philo & Philo Fine Arts, 2004, 115-161; Lubich, B., Das Kreativsubjekt in der DDR. Performative Kunst im Kontext, Göttingen, V & R unipress, 2014; Richter, A., Das Gesetz der Szene. Genderkritik, Performance Art und zweite Öffentlichkeit in der späten DDR, Bielefeld, transcript Verlag (Studien zur visuellen Kunst, Bd. 26), 2019.

12 Artists & Agents. Performancekunst und Geheimdienste, (Ed. by Krasznahorkai, K. and Sasse, S.), Leipzig, Spector Books, 2019.

13 Antoine, J.-P., Une expérience démocratique de l'art? – In: Op.cit., 114-115.

14 From spring 1980, the meetings of the VBK's administration discussed the organisation of the exhibition. A plan was made during the meeting of 14 May 1981 to present action art. The selection criteria were considered during the meetings of June and October 1981. [VBK-Zentralvorstand 8 – Dossier 11 – Präsidiumssitzung 10 April 1980; VBK-Zentralvorstand 9 – 1981 – Dossier 16 – 16 Präsidiumssitzung des VBK-DDR 15 January 1981; Dossier 19: Präsidiumssitzung des VBK-DDR of 14 May 1981; Dossier 20 Fortsetzung Präsidiumssitzung 9 June 1981 Dossier 21 – Festlegungsprotokoll der 21. Präsid. Sitzung am 01.10.1981].

15 On this, see Feist, P.H., Op. cit., 30.

16 See in particular the images published in the contemporary press, Pohl, J., Formal-ästhetische Bildexperimente. Arbeiten von Erhard Monden in der Galerie "Arkade" – Neue Zeit, №183, 5 Aug. 1981, 4; Ivan, G., Sensibilisierung der eigenen Person einige Bemerkungen zu einer eigenwilligen Ausstellung – Bildende Kunst, № 10, 1981, 516-517, the Super 8 film by Robert Rehfeldt, Monden-Performance, 1981, published in Rehfeldt, R. Leben mit der Kunst, DVD, Wohlrab Verlag, 2010, but also retrospective descriptions reported by Blume, E., Joseph Beuys und die DDR – der Einzelne als Politikum – In: Op. Cit. (Ed. by Muschter, G. and Rüdiger Thomas, R.), 137-154; Rehberg, K.S., Op. cit., 115-161; Lubich, B., Op. cit., 331; Richter, A., Das Gesetz der Szene. Genderkritik, Performance Art und zweite Öffentlichkeit in der späten DDR, Bielefeld, transcript Verlag, Studien zur visuellen Kunst, Vol. 26, 2019, 175; Howes, S., Moving Images on the Margins: Experimental Film in Late Socialist East Germany, Rochester, New York, Camden House, 2019, 83.

17 Klaus Werner, "Ausstellung Erhard Monden 10. Juli

In order to answer these questions, a fresh eye will be cast on the encounter of Eugen Blume and Erhard Monden with the work of Joseph Beuys, in the particular context of the divided Germany during the Cold War. The study will focus on the relationships developed between the three men around 1980. So as to cast light on their common interests and understand where their paths converged, consideration must be given to how, in very different contexts, they questioned the relationship between artistic practices and reality and how they revisited the legacy of Karl Marx, each differently, yet in step with each other.

Erhard Monden's action Zeit–Raum–Bild–Realisation and Joseph Beuys' expanded concept of art

If the controversy engendered by Erhard Monden's action in 1981 at the Arkade Gallery in East Berlin is to be believed, the "true realism" pursued there by the artist did not meet the expectations of the GDR public and art critics. This performance, known by the name *Zeit–Raum–Bild–Realisation* (Realization of Time–Space–Image), fell within a series of actions, which began in 1978 in a close dialogue with Joseph Beuys' expanded concept of art. It was held in the summer of 1981, a time when the members of the Visual Artists Association (Verband Bildender Künstler, abbreviated to VBK) were considering the possible integration of art actions (*Aktionskunst* in German) and performances in the GDR's ninth art exhibition, planned to take place in Dresden from autumn 1982 to early spring 1983 and, like previous editions, aimed to present contemporary art practices in the GDR (Fig. 1)¹³. In this particular context, Monden's action was the focus of the first, very rare articles on this subject printed in the *Kunstwissenschaftliche Beiträge*, the monthly supplement to the review *Bildende Kunst*. Since 1979 the supplement had dedicated itself to the debates taking place in the discipline as no journal specialising in art history had ever been created¹⁴. The reception given to the action and the debate it generated were indicative of profound differences but also of the interdependence of the conceptions of art that clashed there.

The documentation related to this performance is diverse and fragmentary and, as often occurs with this type of events, it is only by combining the few visual recordings, descriptions and retrospective accounts that we are able to have an idea of it (Fig. 2)¹⁵. The title *Zeit–Raum–Bild–Realisation* relates to the experience offered by the action: to draw attention to the different temporalities, places and trajectories, and to the encounters and co-operations fleetingly brought together by Monden's dispositive: those of the artist's studio at Dimitroffstraße 197, which marked the point of departure for a walk that took him to the Arkade Gallery at Strausberger Platz 4 on the day the exhibition devoted to the action opened; and those of the gallery that hosted the exhibition of the action, which was opened on 10 July 1981 with a speech by its director, Klaus Werner, that revealed the main components of the action to the public¹⁶. The dispositif also included the times and spaces of Monden's previous actions, whose protocols he presented in display cases, and the times and spaces captured by the sixty photographs organised in series on panels hung on the gallery walls, which presented the sequences of a gymnast's movements, the course of a study trip to Krakow, and the stages of a construction project by a public works brigade photographed by Monden in the context of a commission that encouraged cooperation between artists and the industrial world (*Förderungsauftrag*); and also the times and spaces recorded by Robert Rehfeldt in his experimental film *Art in Progress*. Shot during Monden's work on his spray-painted self-portraits, over which he then walked in wellington boots to expunge the faces – and which were ultimately hung on the gallery walls for the exhibition (thus becoming signs of the encounter between the two artists) – the film records an aspect of the completed action, and Rehfeldt's editing becomes an additional component of it; by showing the film in the exhibition, emphasis was placed on the show's focus on the process of creation¹⁷.

The action thus extended over times that preceded and followed the opening of the exhibition, with the opening being the moment that permitted the public to grasp a given moment. In this dialogue with Beuys' expanded concept of art, Monden showed an attention to reality that was not presented as a form of reflection, symbol or imitation. Indeed, as in Beuys' works, the focus was not placed on a final object that would afterwards be interpreted, but on "the procedures that, short of any desire to interpret, underlie the production, but also the modes of reception of his objects, actions and installations"¹⁸. Reality does not behave as an external element to which the image

1981" – In: Klaus Werner Archiv – 361 – Reden Galerie Arkade – 10 July 1981, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

18 On the film, see Howes, S., Op. cit., 83.

19 Antoine, J.-P., "Je ne travaille pas avec des symboles. Joseph Beuys, l'expérience et la construction du souvenir" – In: Op. cit., 145-198, 147.

20 Klaus Werner, "Ausstellung Erhard Monden 10. Juli 1981" – In: Klaus Werner Archiv – 361 – Reden Galerie Arkade – 10 July 1981, Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

21 Ibid.

22 Saehrendt, C., Kunst als Botschafter einer künstlichen Nation. Studien zur Rolle der bildenden Kunst in der Auswärtigen Kulturpolitik der DDR, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2009, 92.

23 Op. cit. (Ed. by Krasznahorkai, K. and Sasse, S.).

24 Ivan, G., Op. cit., 516-517.

25 Blume, E., typescript "Zu Erhard Monden Zeit-Raum-Bild-Realisation", dated 11 November 1981 – In: Ausstellungsanalyse VBK-Zentralvorstand 1748 – Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

26 See Blume, E., "Joseph Beuys und die DDR – der Einzelne als Politikum", Op. cit., 137-154.

27 The first of the four texts to react to Blume's article was by Professor Hermann Raum, a Kunstwissenschaftler in Halle and the author of the only GDR book on contemporary art in the FDA. His reply to Eugen Blume appeared in April 1982 (№ 4), titled "Gefolgschaft und Abgrenzung" (203-204); articles appeared in May (№ 5) by Hermann Peters in Berlin, "Konventionelle Randbemerkungen" (255-256) and Klaus Weidner, a Kunstwissenschaftler in Berlin and president of the central office of the Kunstwissenschaft in the VBK, "Vom künstlerischen Produkt hin zum Prinzip Kunst" (256-257); the debate was brought to a close in June (№ 6) by Blume's remarks, "Aktion und Reaktion" (307), and a summing up by Peter Pachnicke, an art critic in Berlin, "Funktion und Wirksamkeit befragen. Resümierende Gedanken" (307-309).

refers to, the dispositifs of the action are where reality emerges. In the opinion of Klaus Werner, Erhard Monden does not fall in the lineage of a realism conceived as a copy of the external world, nor of that of anti-realism. This diagnosis, made by Werner in his speech when opening the exhibition, allowed him to distinguish Monden from the "conservative conception of the professional artist largely disseminated" in the GDR. For him, it was not a matter of arguing against brush painting, but of stressing that its comfortable exclusivity maintains "the value judgement in favour of a relationship of linear imitation to reality that is dominant among the art public and the strategies of the ruling classes"¹⁹. To separate Monden from this lineage, Werner first recalled the various plastic means used by the artist – photography, stencil, spray paint – and then compared his work with that of Francis Bacon, Andy Warhol, Bruce Nauman, Arnulf Rainer, Michael Badura, Floris Neusüss, Ben Vautier, Timm Ullrichs, and Gilbert and George²⁰. During his rapprochement of Monden's techniques with those used in the West, Klaus Werner passed lightly over the unusual nature of Monden's research methods in a socialist context. The rapid comparison he made, without any precise analysis of the similarities he advanced, avoided the question of art theoretical issues faced by the artist. Caught up in the logic of the Cold War, the "relationship of linear imitation to reality" was contradicted by the artistic practices – of which, according to Werner, Monden availed himself – utilised to the west of the Iron Curtain, mostly in the English-speaking world. Klaus Werner's speech galvanised the political opposition by which the artistic practices were infused at the time, but it was no longer so much the forms as the supposed underlying principles by which they were motivated that would be criticised by *Kunstwissenschaftler* in *Bildende Kunst*.

As from the 1970s, the political doctrine represented by socialist realism embraced a variety of artistic forms, provided that they could be recognised as being compatible with socialism's social and political project. In this context, the 1980s were characterised by greater surveillance of artistic circles by the secret services, which ultimately led to increased indifference to the variety of plastic expressions while the Stasi remained in control of them²¹. Certain artistic creations could, for example, draw on the heritage of constructivism, or on that of avant-garde collages and montages; and while the forms that were developed in capitalist countries (such as abstractions and object assemblages) could be considered disruptive, particularly in the case of performances, they were not strictly forbidden as long as they remained under close surveillance²². More than forms, it was the conception of reality that Monden's actions entailed, and the realism that could emerge from it, such as Beuys' social sculpture, that would stimulate debate.

The disputed reception given to Monden's performance

All the texts produced in regard to this action indicate that what was inadmissible was not the form of the performance, but the specific conception of its link to reality. Monden's work was not posited as a reflection of reality; action gave it form. It was the processes that the action involved, the experiences to which it invited the observer, that were inadmissible. How did this conception of the work's link with reality differ from the expectations of the GDR's *Kunstwissenschaft*? In order to understand this, it is necessary to return to the terms of the debate that composed the characteristics of Monden's work and Eugen Blume's discourse in strict opposition to the expectations of *Kunstwissenschaft*.

The controversy grew out of a detailed report made by the *Kunstwissenschaftlerin* Gabriela Ivan that was published in the review *Bildende Kunst* under the title "Sensibilisierung der eigenen Person. Einige Bemerkungen zu einer eigenwilligen Ausstellung" [Increasing awareness of one's own person. Remarks on an idiosyncratic exhibition]²³. In the wake of this publication, the recent *Kunstwissenschaftler* graduate, Eugen Blume, who worked with the gallery owner Klaus Werner, proposed to give his own arguments in favour of Erhard Monden's work to the same review in November 1981²⁴. *Bildende Kunst* accepted, on the condition that Blume's arguments were discussed by other *Kunstwissenschaftler*²⁵. Blume's article, which rebutted Gabriela Ivan's, appeared in the April issue of 1982, but not without having been subjected to modifications²⁶. In the April and May issues 1982, it was followed by opinions of the *Kunstwissenschaftler* Hermann Raum, Hermann Peters and Klaus Weidner. In June, the same year, the review published the final points of the debate, which were presented by Eugen Blume himself, and brought it to an end with a summing up by the critic Peter Pachnicke that ended with a discreditation of Blume's arguments²⁷.

The arguments advanced by the representatives of *Kunstwissenschaft* all corresponded to a specific conception of realism, giving rise to a debate nurtured by a diverse range of opinions. The different aspects under which this conception was presented demonstrated unity in diversity and together faced down Eugen Blume's arguments. Although these arguments appeared in the various forms of an exhibition review, theoretical considerations unrelated to any work, and developments constructed around specific examples, they all converged around a series of themes at the nub of the criticisms aimed at Monden's work and Blume's arguments in its favour. According to the ripostes, Monden and Blume contradicted the expectations of both art and the visitors to the GDR exhibition. The imaginative power (*Vorstellungskraft*), artistic process (*Kunstvorgang*) and act of artistic creation (*Akt des künstlerischen Schaffens*) that characterised Monden's processual execution were presented as being antithetical to the visual sensibility of the observer (*visuelle Sensitivität des Betrachters*) and to the outcome of the artistic productivity (*Ergebnis künstlerischer Produktivität*) that prevail in the function of reproduction (*Abbildungsfunktion*) that the GDR's *Kunstwissenschaft* expected art to fulfil. Further criticisms in the review were that the characteristics of Monden's action and Blume's arguments obscured the public's reception and created problems of communication. Rather than encouraging a collective response, the action ultimately only centred on the artist's individual viewpoint and from a psychologising perspective, bordering on mysticism and even martyrdom. It was viewed as lacking in any social dimension.

One of the principal ideas that ran through these arguments is that, through their response to conceptual art and performance art, Monden and Blume made reference to socio-economic processes that had their roots in the inhuman conditions of capitalist society. Thus, being strangers to socialism, they could neither interest nor have a place in the GDR. It was not the forms but the underlying principles deemed to pervade the artistic production of the capitalist West by which Monden's creation and Blume's defence of it were corrupted: principles that were represented pre-eminently by the names of artists gathered by Klaus Werner to represent the world of the capitalist avant-gardes, with which, he assumed, Monden's artistic practices were in a dialogue at a level that was ultimately more political than art theoretical. Monden's chief failing was that his manipulation of photography and painting, infused by processes arising from these non-socialist sources, destroyed their "function of reflection". As for Blume, he was reproached for his non-dialectical conception of the work of art, as well as his literal espousal of Beuys' concept of art as being the only creative activity and method of revolutionary change, an idealistic conception of the artist that betrayed his ignorance of the Marxist debates on these questions²⁸. The dominant aspect of the debate, therefore, was not the unacceptable nature of the plastic form chosen by Monden for his work – i.e., an action – which Blume defended. Peter Pachnicke, whose article brought the debate to a close, offered a series of actions that met the expectations of a socialist country: for example, he mentioned Manfred Butzmann's poster actions (*Plakataktionen*) of 1977, the concept of Helfried Strauss's exhibition "Die Fähre" (The Ferry), and Gregor Torsten Kozik's photographs of the Harlass foundry, all of which, Pachnicke argued, dialectically express the important moments in the artistic process (production, reception, artistic activity, educational sensitivity), with respect for societal precepts and collective and pedagogical issues. It was all these expectations – the function of art to reflect society and the political system by which it is governed, and its social dimension of being accessible to the public – that were questioned by Monden's offering, and defended by Blume. It was this that was inadmissible because it challenged the conception of realism on which *Kunstwissenschaft* is based. Monden and Blume threatened the relationship between art and imitation, the very thing that ensures that artistic production has a demonstrative function, based on a pedagogical conception of the effectiveness of art established in accordance with linear relations between representation, its meaning and its effects²⁹.

Kunstwissenschaft's rapport with action

Returning to Eugen Blume's arguments, it was not the main lines of realism that he challenged, but the interpretative means that *Kunstwissenschaft* claimed in order to address artistic actions. He pointed out its limits, and it was this that gave him his strength of contradiction. Blume was perfectly aware of the arguments of *Kunstwissenschaft*, and he had no interest in deepening the gulf that separated Monden from

28 Pachnicke, P., "Funktion und Wirksamkeit befragen. Resümierende Gedanken" – *Bildende Kunst*, № 6, 1982, 307-309.

29 Peter H. Feist, Blume's professor, laid out the main principles of the discipline in *Prinzipien und Methoden marxistischer Kunstwissenschaft. Versuch eines Abrisses*, Leipzig, VEB E.A., Seemann Verlag, 1966, which he drew up on the basis of a lecture he had given in Munich in November 1964. *Kunstwissenschaft* follows on from philosophical materialism and has its roots in the idea that there is an objective reality that is reflected, and that it is in principle recognisable. It helps to understand the specificities of artistic creation as a form of consciousness and production, and it sheds light on the relationship between work and art, and the relationship of form to content in a work. The fundamental prerequisites for this are found in the reflection theory of Marxist philosophy, as shaped by Lenin in his book *Materialismus und Empiriozentrismus* (Berlin, 1949). Philosophical materialism provides the most effective tools for the explanation of the processes of art history, the conditions and origins of the formation (*Entstehen*) and transformation of artistic visions/appearances (*Erscheinung*). Seen from this perspective, art is understood as a reflection of reality as it is appropriated by the artist. In seeking to understand the logic of artistic creation and to explore the paths of this artistic appropriation so as to cast light on the consciousness on which the work reflects, *Kunstwissenschaft* starts from the premise that social existence (*gesellschaftliches Sein*) determines consciousness (*Bewusstsein*).

30 Although, as already mentioned, Eugen Blume's dissertation has not been preserved, the question of production is at the heart of the texts he published in *Bildende Kunst* on Monden's performance, which refer to the main ideas in his academic work.

31 Feist had spoken from the standpoint of his function in favour of artistic practices whose content would not necessarily be determined but which could be open, variable. Bonnke, M., *Kunst in Produktion. Bildende Kunst und volkseigene Wirtschaft* in der SBZ/DDR, Cologne, Weimar, Vienna, 2007, 303-304.

32 Philippe Junod was interested in the multiple dimensions of mimesis and he reminds us in particular that its object of imitation may not consist in material reality but in its underlying principle. Reproduction (Abbildung) is then replaced by production (Bildung) of a different nature, while the mimetic relationship is transformed into an analogical parallelism: emulation rather than imitation. See Junod, P., *Chemins de traverse. Essai sur l'histoire des arts*, Lausanne, Infolio, 2007, 25, in particular "Plus vrai que nature? Les avatars de la mimesis", 101-143.

33 Raum, H., *Gefolgschaft und Abgrenzung – Bildende Kunst*, № 4, 1982, 203-204.

34 Weidner, K., *Vom künstlerischen Produkt hin zum Prinzip Kunst – Bildende Kunst*, № 5, 1982, 256-257.

35 On the theory of effect and cybernetics, see in particular Lubich, L., *Op. cit.*

the conceptions of this discipline. In his various texts – the first, which he originally submitted to the journal *Bildende Kunst* in November 1981, was subjected to revision and eventually appeared in the March 1982 issue, and his final arguments in June 1982 – his interest in action was never motivated by a quest for emancipation based on an imported capitalist model.

Above all, Blume diagnosed the lack of means in *Kunstwissenschaft* to analyse these performative practices. For him, forms of description, iconographic conventions and criteria of judgement were inadequate and gave a distorted picture of the line Monden was attempting to follow. Blume invited his readers to distinguish between static artistic practices – the only ones, he wrote, to which *Kunstwissenschaft*, developed on conceptions inherited from the 19th century, was dedicated – and mobile forms. According to Blume, the rift between these two lines can be traced back to Dadaism, which developed one of the most radical principles of art, of which Joseph Beuys is the direct heir. Beuys' name, mentioned in Blume's first submission to the journal, disappeared eventually from the published articles, but it was from the artist's expanded concept of art that the critic developed his view of actions, and his opponents were therefore fully aware of it. Taking this genealogy as his starting point, Blume noted how the question of the social conception of art is subject to distinct interpretations. Either the finished work reflects this conception, or the social dimension takes shape from the process of artistic production and the experience it leads to. He thus contrasts the conception of artistic production as a *reflection of reality* with the conception of the ways in which artistic practices form reality. It was this latter and eminently social conception of art that drew Blume's attention to Beuys' notion of social sculpture, which he made the subject of his dissertation. His interest in Beuys' proposals to use art to transform living conditions was a way of questioning the educational functions attributed to art in the GDR, particularly the conception of artistic production as a reflection of reality. By returning, through Beuys, to the social conception of art stemming from Dada, Blume posited the need to challenge the Marxist-Leninist postulate that social existence (*gesellschaftliches Sein*) determines consciousness and makes artistic production the illustration of this one-way determinism insofar as it reflects the social conditions in which it has taken shape. For Blume, the exercise of art has to be placed on a different plane, one that allows it to be recognised as constitutive of and constituting reality. Therefore, rather than focusing on art as production, as *Kunstwissenschaft* suggests, in his dissertation Blume focuses on its modes of production (*Produktionsweise*). Taking that as his basis, he was able to consider the multiple correlations and interdependencies between social existence and consciousness, rather than thinking of them in a relationship of precedence of one over the other, and in doing so he thus coincided with Erhard Monden's perspective³⁰.

Although these arguments in favour of differentiation may seem bold in the context of the artistic debates taking place in the GDR, they were not inconsequent. A few years earlier, in 1974, at a seminar of the Marxist-Leninist *Kultur- und Kunstwissenschaft* of the Institute of Social Sciences, Blume's professor, Peter H. Feist, had himself taken a stand in favour of works described as operating with an "open end". He refused to see this as a sign of the artist's compositional and ideological weakness, but rather as an indication of the work's intellectual productivity³¹. Despite being immobile works, whose openness may not have contradicted the function of reflection (of reality) as long as it referred to its underlying principle³², this fact nevertheless emphasised that Blume's discourse fell well within the order of debates that the GDR had been experiencing for some years.

The subjects he addressed in his stand in favour of Monden were neither ignored nor banned by *Kunstwissenschaft*. Moreover, his opponents comfortably reduced his arguments to the main lines of the discipline in order to show that it had already embraced these themes, without highlighting the nuances that Blume was attempting to introduce. Thus, the question of the mode of production as the subject of artistic action was linked by Hermann Raum to the mobility (*Beweglichkeit*) that any form of work³³ can achieve and by Klaus Weidner to the social or political effects that Heartfield's photomontages or Brecht's plays are able to stimulate³⁴. These interpretations resonate with the theory of effect (*Wirkungstheorie*) developed in the GDR in the mid-1960s, particularly in literature and the performing arts. Founded on cybernetic theories, this theory was conceived in binary terms (action/reaction, cause/effect) and perfectly harmonised with dialectical thinking³⁵. But this is to move away from

the singularity of Blume's thinking, which, rather than reiterating the binary schemas, invites us to reconsider them.

Blume, Beuys and Marx

It was not, therefore, the forms or notions of effect, production or disalienation linked to realism in the GDR that were shaken by Blume's and Monden's arguments. What they upset was not purely the conception of art as a reflection of reality but also the conception of the relations that underlie realism – and this was all the more disruptive for *Kunstwissenschaft* since Blume had no intention of belittling the discipline. His purpose in pointing out its limits was to better envision its necessary developments. His recognition of Beuys' social sculpture and Monden's actions derived directly from the principles of Marxist-Leninist *Kunstwissenschaft* as they were formulated by Peter H. Feist in the book *Prinzipien und Methoden marxistischer Kunstwissenschaft. Versuch eines Abrisses* (Principles and Methods of the Science of Marxist Art. Attempt at a Synopsis)³⁶ (Fig. 3). Taking that as his starting point, Blume developed a particular interest in what these same principles had failed to take into consideration in Karl Marx's conception of art. It was by returning to Marx's fundamentals that Blume was able to see Beuys' social sculpture as "true realism".

So as to accentuate further the emphasis on the process of the action, in his article in support of Monden, Blume turned to Marx's theory of economics, quoting almost word for word the same passage also mentioned in the "Principles and Methods of the Marxist Science of Art". In this, Feist explained how *Kunstwissenschaft* uses Marx's theory as it is laid out in the introduction to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859): "The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but, on the contrary, their social existence determines their consciousness"³⁷. From this springs the above mentioned conception of the inextricable link between a work of art and the politico-socio-cultural context from which it derives. According to this theory, there is neither a possibility of an artistic particularity to be envisioned with respect to other areas of human production, nor art is able, beyond its inscription in a given context, to open particular investigations or to have its own cognitive value.

In contrast, for Blume, this reference to Marx offered a point of departure to better distinguish the artistic practices in other domains of production. To his mind, they could not be considered a mode of production as it was defined by Marx's political economy, and therefore neither did they correspond to the logic that social existence determines consciousness. Artistic practices stand apart from other forms of work, in that they make no separation between production time and free time, they are freed from the alienated relationship with the product and are a means to consider the human being in his or her totality. Through the reversals that they entail, artistic practices fall within a singular field that the art of an action very particularly reveals. Blume summarised this point of view in a remark at the end of his text:

The term 'mode of production' as I have used it is derived from political economy and is thus problematic. I based my decision on Marx's thesis, which discusses art as a particular mode of production on account of its conception of objectives. I argue that the artistic mode of production presents itself as a model of a mode of free production. To the greatest extent possible, it has succeeded in eliminating the alienated relationship with the product. It also does not distinguish between time devoted to the production of products and free time, but counts it all as 'activity'. This means that the artist is a producer in all his actions, i.e., an artist. Even if he does not produce directly using his hands, his mental relationship to things is a component of his mode of production³⁸.

Note that Blume says that he has based his argument on Marx's thesis that art is a particular form of production, as if this notion were widely shared. However, it is precisely this idea that Feist left out of the "Principles of *Kunstwissenschaft*". Twice in his book, Feist returns to the idea that art has its own laws, which have been identified by Marx, Engels and Lenin³⁹. While these specificities – which are part of the history of forms and the history of the mind – had already been the subject of high-level research by non-Marxist art historians, according to Feist the *Kunstwissenschaftler* in

36 Feist, P.H., *Prinzipien und Methoden marxistischer Kunstwissenschaft. Versuch eines Abrisses*, Leipzig, VEB E.A. Seemann Verlag, 1966.

37 Quoted by *Ibid.*, 16.

38 Blume, E., typescript "Zu Erhard Monden Zeit-Raum-Bild-Realisation", dated 11 November 1981. – In: *Ausstellungsanalyse VBK-Zentralvorstand 1748 – Akademie der Künste*, Berlin.

39 Feist, P.H., *Op. Cit.*, 1966, 12, 17.

40 Morawski, S., The Aesthetic Views of Marx and Engels – The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism, Vol. 28, N°3, Spring, 1970, 301-314. This was a preparatory article for: Marx & Engels on Literature & Art: A Selection of Writings, (Ed. by Morawski, S. and Baxandall, L.) Saint Louis, Telos Press, 1973.

41 Antoine, J.-P., La traversée du XXe siècle. Joseph Beuys, l'image et le souvenir, Geneva, 2011, 240.

42 On this, see Morawski, S. and Baxandall, L., Op. cit.

the GDR had other priorities, in particular to consider artistic practices through the prism of the socio-economic values governing the different fields of society. Yet it was this question, that of art's singular place in Marx's thought, which was unaddressed by Feist, in which Blume was interested.

What is this singular place that Marx gave to art? How does it differ from the logic of economic theory? On this, Blume does not elaborate. To have an idea of its characteristics, a diversion can be made via the work of Stefan Morawski, a Marxist specialist in the history of aesthetics who made a detailed critique of the application of the socialist system in Poland, without turning away from Marx. The ideas he set out in his article "The Aesthetic Views of Marx and Engels"⁴⁰ provide a better understanding of Blume's conception of Marx's art and the "true realism" that Blume and Monden discerned in Joseph Beuys' social sculpture. Morawski reminds us that neither Marx nor Engels ever gave a finite form to an aesthetic. By pulling together the scattered commentaries, Morawski secured a standpoint on the place of art in the thinking of the fathers of Marxism. He distinguishes it from the Marxist-Leninist conceptions of art formed by the sciences in the service of the socialist revolution in state socialism. He demonstrates how, in the thought of the architects of Marxism, the field of art is traversed by the various questions that preoccupy society, whether of appropriation, functionality, alienation, realism, or the cognitive dimension to which art contributes. However, these questions are posed in a very particular way, since art heralds reconciliation. Thus, *homo aestheticus*, whose "advent requires the radical socio-political transformation of all humanity", might be implied by a reconciliation society. There is no question of isolating art from the other fields of society, but the social consciousness to which it gives form does not respond to the same rationalizable mechanisms and leads to irreducible potential "becomings".

Thus, Blume's return to the particular place given to art in Marx's thought is the guarantee of a possible break with reflection theory, as it was applied by realism in the GDR. It is also what allows us to conceptualise what weaves the multiple links that form reality together in the process of executing the action. Jean-Philippe Antoine captures this idea wonderfully in the actions of Joseph Beuys:

The effect on the spectator of all these components [of the action] must then be considered as laying a positive claim to 'taking a stand in favour of reality, whose material is a form of appearance'. In the signifying perception of time, as in that of objects, it is once again a question of leaving the theatre of representation, with its predefined codes, to arrive at the presentation of the thing itself, *endowed with its implications*. The claim to bring the spectator into a theatrical time governed by symbolic laws is replaced by another undertaking: that of inducing the spectators to experience the singular temporality of the actions without them leaving the space of ordinary life in which they operate. Despite the links with the ordinary time of perception that it refuses to break, this presentation indeed belongs to a figural strategy⁴¹.

It is in this very particular light that the possible entwining of Beuys's expanded concept of art and Marx's thinking on art is manifested. For Eugen Blume, it is this entwining that forms the basis for the juxtaposition of social sculpture with "true realism". A return to Marx's thinking on art, which was mostly elaborated before he developed his economic system⁴², does not serve to establish a break, as Althusser did, between the young Marx steeped in the lessons of Hegel and that of economic theory. This is a way of reconsidering that the effectiveness of the Marxian vision of the world does not stem from its purely scientific nature; it is also derived from the social sciences, comprising different kinds of knowledge developed over the long term, without the possibility of immediate application. This return allows us to think that Marx's teachings – steeped in his early, disruptive, non-theoretical thought – undermined their systematic adoption by political regimes. Blume invites us to think *with* Marx in spite of the instances of instrumentalisation of which his thought may have been the object, and by this return reopens the possibility of considering his thought in an ongoing process.

In this context, the relationship between Marx's thinking on art and Beuys's social sculpture revolves around the conception of production, emancipation and disalienation by dint of art, through its processes. Whereas Marx envisaged man's disalienation and his becoming a productive and educated *homo ludens* once "the radical

socio-political transformation of all humanity"⁴³ had taken place, Joseph Beuys' social sculpture – more than a hundred years later – seems to have aimed at doing just that and thereby constitutes "true realism". This implicit occult dialogue between two conceptions of art helps us understand why the potentialities of action, as conceived by Blume and Monden, were inadmissible for GDR's *Kunstwissenschaft*. They challenged the conception of art that is faithful to reflection theory and led to the prospect of a poetic Marxist conception that includes the possibility of an ongoing process. This poetic conception presupposes a radical transformation of society and thus also, in the context of our interest, a critique of the artistic production of socialist society. For this reason, these conceptions of art could only be considered by the *Kunstwissenschaftler* of the GDR as the expression of an idealism of the artist, and they were therefore criticised (as by Pachnicke in his article that closed the debate on Monden's action) and rejected as inadmissible in the GDR.

Through this dialogue, Joseph Beuys does not appear to have been an imported model by which young artists and theoreticians, belated imitators, lacking in contact with foreign countries, would have expected to be inspired. Beuys had his place in a set of reflections that stemmed from a particular knowledge of the issues at stake in the debates on realism in the socialist space and the revisions that a return to Marx allowed, reflections that were specific to these young artists and interest in which Beuys shared.

By advancing the oxymoron of Beuys' social sculpture as "true realism", Blume and Monden dissolved the contradiction between the production of an artist whose upbringing took place in capitalist economic conditions and the project of realism as pursued by the GDR. They disclosed the degree to which territorial and political logics governed the analysis of artistic practices and defined the relations by means of which they operated. And they pointed out how, if Beuys' social sculpture is the "true realism", these conventional markers are blurred and logics overturned. It was a way for them to bring together what is usually kept separate and never questioned. This made it possible for Beuys' ambition to recognise "every human being as an artist" to resonate with that of the "Bitterfelder Weg" programme⁴⁴, which in 1959 and again in 1964 defined the rapprochement between art and life in socialist society; or for Beuys' expanded concept of art, which defines society as a social sculpture, to resonate with socialist realism's ambitions to actively contribute to the formation of socialist society. Thus, with Blume and Monden, we are invited to reconsider the relationships between opposing poles within the socio-cultural boundaries of ideological conflicts, but also in artistic practices, and to question the binary conception that is so often held of them, even today.

Far from apprehending the artistic relations between the East and the West during the Cold War in terms of logics of binary oppositions, between rival narratives that fulfilled distinct logics, this singular deployment of Beuys' expanded concept of art in this reflection on "true realism" using the thought of the young Marx as a medium offers a particular point of view on the question of how to appreciate *in a different way* what took place between the artistic spheres on both sides of the Iron Curtain. The boundaries around which the narratives were organised in line with oppositions between underdevelopment and progress, tradition and avant-garde, politics and autonomy, infiltrating the representations borne by the artistic achievements of the East and the West, as promoted by the different political systems, are blurred. Starting from the weakening of these divisions and conflicts, which were nonetheless very much in existence, creations materialised, which, having assimilated them, reconfigured the relations that linked what the borders separated. This, at least, was what brought together the interests of the young East Germans – Monden and Blume – and Joseph Beuys, each of whom was marked by the context in which he lived and worked – and more generally by the conditions that the Cold War imposed on artistic relations – who would succeed in joining together on 2 April 1983, in spite of the physical distance between them, around a performance entitled Sender-Empfänger (Transmitter-Receiver). But that is another story...

43 Morawski, S., *Op.cit.*, 305.

44 See the Bildatlas article on this subject:
<https://www.bildatlas-ddr-kunst.de/education.php?pn=glossary&id=98>