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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

CHRISTO'S DIALOGUE WITH THE PUBLIC

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Wall of Oil Barrels - Iron Curtain, Paris 27th June 1962

5,600 Cubic Meter Package, Documenta, 4, Kassel 1967/68

Wrapped Kunsthalla, Bern, Switzerland, 1968

Running Fence, California, 1972/76

Running Fence, California, 1972/76

Wrapped Reichstag, Project for Berlin, 1979
Collage in two parts.

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INTRODUCTION

Christo is internationally known for his 'temporary' wrappings in both urban and rural areas and ranks among the most prolific and public artists in the late twentieth century. He is an artist whose overriding concern is to involve as many people as possible in his work, drawing from a wide range in the social strata. I have chosen him for my thesis not only because of his involvement with the public, but also because of his extraordinary ability to work outside of the art establishment and yet to remain very much part of it.

Whilst Christo's projects employ enormous amounts of time, trouble, money and recruited labour in a very complicated process, completed they appear simple since only he as originator remains. In many ways his work is like the operas of Wagner which set out to dominate, even overwhelm, flooding the audience with sensory impressions of different kinds. They are not meant as information but as experience. But whereas Wagner's theory of a total art which he realised through opera was part of his ideal of a unified 'high' art, Christo's huge scale controversial projects attempts to broaden the scope and audience of modern art, breaking down traditional barriers between art and society.

Since Christo's projects do not originate from a mainstream visual arts tradition, but rather from the constructivist

commitment to mass production and involvement, they are relatively unencumbered by that tradition's specific demands and their effectiveness cannot be measured in exclusively artistic terms. His utilisation of scale, the media and the general public are an intrinsic part of his creative process.

This thesis will initially discuss Christo's background and the various influences on his life which have resulted in his present work. Following which I will examine through three works - The Museum of Contemporary Art, The Running Fence and The Wrapped Reichstag, Project for Berlin - his dialogue with the public. I will discuss the process through which Christo's work goes prior to the final realisation in which his utilisation of the media, scale and impermanence play a major role.

I will assess Christo's impact on a socio-political level with the aim of defining his process of communication with the public on a local level as well as in a wider, more overtly political sense. At the same time I will question the aesthetic content inherent in his work to clarify the basis of his creative input which has played a major part in his work.

In all four chapters I have dealt, to an extent, with his working methods which are an intrinsic part of his creative process.

CHAPTER I

The impact and influence of Christo's early years prior to going to America are crucial to his development as an artist. He has always acknowledged the importance his youth in Bulgaria had on his life and the later years in Paris.

"My origins are extremely important for what I am doing. Even fundamental. I owe a great deal to my home background and to my training at the academy of art in Sofia"(1)

The following pages deal with these influences in an attempt to understand and contextualize Christo's early years as an artist in relation to his later work.

Christo Javacheff (2) was born in Bulgaria in 1935 into a wealthy intellectual family. His father was a successful chemical manufacturer until 1944 when the business was nationalised by the State. His mother, who came from a distinguished family in Macedonia, had been secretary to the Sofia Fine Arts Academy before her marriage during which time she had met and become friendly with a number of exiled Russian artists. Throughout Christo's childhood the family was closely involved in the arts which resulted in Christo, who from an early age showed artistic promise, being encouraged to draw and paint by his parents.

In 1952 at the age of seventeen he enrolled at the Sofia Fine Arts Academy. The Academy's teaching at the time was very traditional with its main emphasis on history, the humanities and craftsmanship. There Christo was undistracted by avant-garde influences of the western world and he became a proficient realist painter specialising in portraiture. Christo and his fellow students also studied Marxism and were sent out at weekends to agit prop teams. Their job was to paint and erect billboards and to assist and advise farmers in tidying the land along the section where the orient express passed in order to glorify the work of the farmers on their collective farms. This gratuitous manicuring of the Bulgarian countryside consisted of involving farmers in the orderly stacking of hay in the summer, artistically covering it with tarpaulin, fashioning parapets of snow in the winter and positioning tractors and machinery at dramatic points in the landscape.

"During that period I was working in Bulgaria doing propaganda art - communist propaganda art - participating in public manifestations, making billboards and things in factories, working with many students. I even did huge portraits of Karl Marx and Lenin. All my work was involved constantly with many people, in the factories and in the farmland. All my activities perhaps developed my liking of dealing with people". (3)

Bulgaria is more closely allied to the USSR than most other European Social Democratic countries, but Christo's time at the Academy coincided with Stalin's death in 1953 and the country enjoyed a brief respite from the oppressive cultural atmosphere which prevailed in Eastern Europe. The Academy played a relatively minor role in Christo's career, what was in fact more important was his contact in the film and theatre world through his older brother who was an actor, and Christo's compulsory involvement in the Bulgarian propaganda programmes which were reminiscent of agit prop and blue blouse movements in post-revolutionary Russia in the twenties.

At the time of Christo's involvement with the postwar Bulgarian stage it was undergoing a revitalisation of the revolutionary spirit of the Russian theatre of the twenties. Working with fellow students he helped choose locations and sets for film-makers. The artistic director at the time of the Bulgarian State film studios was Sergi Vasiliev, a veteran of the Russian cinema, and it was he who introduced Christo to the theatre of Alexandre Tairov and the improvisational direction of Evgeni Vakhtangov. Through his mother he had already learned about Vladimir Mayakovsky, Tatlin, Natalia Goncharova, El Lissitzky and Vsevolod Meyerhold's biomechanic theatre. Long before the Western world was adequately aware of the events surrounding Russia in the twenties, Christo was aware of Nathan Altman's celebration of the first anniversary

of the October Revolution where Vritsky Square in Petrograd was decorated in Cubo-Futurist designs in wood and cardboard and thousands of yards of canvas. He was also familiar with Nikolai Evreinov and Iurii Annenkov's re-enactment of the storming of the Winter Palace in 1920 which had over 10,000 participants.

The work of the Russian Constructivists is of paramount importance to Christo's development despite the thirty years gap between them (4)

Constructivism was first and foremost the expression of a deeply motivated conviction that the artist could contribute to enhancing the physical and intellectual needs of the whole society. They advocated dealing with reality in its own terms rather than submitting it to an artistic function, believing that in order to do away with academicism art's outmoded tools must be got rid of and they insisted upon the use of real space and materials. As artistic and political revolutions mingled towards the end of the twenties, the constructivist artists had to come to terms with different elements from a range of extra-aesthetic realms. Their vision of modernism was as an all encompassing socio-cultural mandate, to reform art's function as well as its form. Their socialism encouraged the overthrow of antiquated notions in art, advocated

change, experimentation and promoted a populist point of view. Their problem was to find an artistic vocabulary to match their socialist concepts. The struggle was between two opposing factions. One felt that the working classes had not yet had a chance to evolve their own revolutionary culture, and that the most avant-garde the most modern by the highest current standards, would have to suffice while a truly revolutionary culture evolved. The other faction held that the revolution could only come from beneath and that only the workers could provide a new culture. The groups Feks and Blue Blouse and the Agit Trains and the Agit Boats evolved directly from the latter approach. Perhaps the best examples of worker/artist collaboration were the series of concerts for factory hooters and other noises suggested originally by the poets Gastiev and Mayakovsky, taking place from 1918 onwards. The most impressive must have been one in Beku in November 1922 when the sirens of all the factories, the foghorn of all the ships, squadrons of machine guns and two battalions of artillery were used, together with a 'choir' consisting of thousands of spectators in an enormous symphony.

These artists believed that the mechanisation and introduction into art of industrial materials and machine methods reduced its preciousness and enhanced its potential in serving the needs of tomorrow's classeless society. For them the truly

modern artist was the one who left art behind. One for whom art was a means of changing the human environment and for whom mass production constituted its ideal end.

In the end however, it was the theatricalisation of art which the artists realised finally guaranteed its communication to vast and often illiterate audiences.

It had become clear that they would not overnight establish the new order they wanted and in the theatre at least they could establish an illusion of that new order. It was a strategy which enabled them to elude ownership and offer equal enjoyment and fulfillment for all.

When one compares Christo to constructivism, its influence on him is obvious. We find that Christo's art also condenses the prevailing social reality in that he too is directly concerned with mass involvement in his work as part of its creative process. Just as in revolutionary Russia a truly modern artist was one for whom art was a means of changing the human environment and for whom mass production played a major role in casting art's ideal end, so Christo appears to dodge aesthetics in order to focus attention on the human, ecological and technical aspects of his work. But even though he rarely discusses aesthetic aspects of his work we must assume that there is some aesthetic plotting in his process because the end product in, for example, the Running Fence and Surroundee Islands has such formal strength.

Constructivism however, did not intend an aesthetic statement as the end product. At no point did the work done in Russia during the twenties consciously confront aesthetic issues, rather their concentration on the masses enabled them to move beyond the issue of beauty and form and focus attention on the socialist ideology which would theoretically enable them to socialise art for the people removing it from accepted fine art aesthetic values. But Christo avoids this close encounter with reality and even though both the constructivists and Christo do display an element of theatrical fiction in their work. Christo's theatricalisation has its roots in aesthetics while the constructivists were primarily concerned with communication. Even though Christo wraps buildings in cities where construction is on-going as he did in Chicago when he wrapped the Museum of Contemporary Art, or in the case of Running Fence which runs 24½ miles, 18 ft. high across land, with 4 ft. high animal fences, in essence the final realisation of the work is so simple that dramatisation plays only a small role in it for all the workers remain in a sense behind the scenes. Another comparison one can make between Christo and the constructivists is that today he is no longer able to make his work without using industrial processes.

Though Christo remembers chaffing at the official restraint of his formative years, it was through them that he developed an interest in how government s functioned. He learned how exhilarating group efforts can be as well as how to guage dimensions on a landscape scale. At the same time his work in the theatre taught him the economy of means coupled with directness of purpose. He developed a talent for staging and fostered the notion that the process of art should not be entirely overshadowed by its product. It was at this early age that Christo discovered the effectiveness of size and its power to communicate and impress the viewer.

In 1956 Christo left Sofia for Czechoslovakia where he had recieved permission to study theatre direction and stage design at the Burin theatre in Prague under its director Emil Burin, an associate of Brecht who first introduced Christo to contemporary visual art. Again he was emmersed in the spirit of the Russian theatre of the twenties, for Burin was very much a rebel who braved the censors in his controversial productions which drew from Russian models. Christo remained in Prague for only a short length of time and when the Russian suppression of the Hungarian uprising in late 1956 cut him off from Bulgaria and threatened the fragile freedom of Czechoslovakia, he contacted a doctor he knew who was helping people to flee the country. In January 1957 he crossed the border into Austria on a train packed with medical supplies.

Christo went to Vienna where he enrolled as a student at the city's art academy in their sculpture department under Robert Anderson and Fritz Wotruba. He spent one term there and then moved on to Geneva for a few months where he stayed with a cousin painting portraits to support himself. Then in March 1958 Christo went to Paris where he was to remain until 1964 when he moved to New York.

From this time until he left Paris, Christo moved away from the influence of his Bulgarian years. He chose to disregard his involvement with the theatre and any influence that his participation in the Bulgarian agit prop programme, compulsory though it had been, was temporarily pushed aside. One suspects that his contradictory involvement with experimental theatre and film while pursuing an extremely academic training as a painter in Eastern Europe had a lot to do with a need to escape from the conservative academic training of the Sofia Fine Arts Academy in Bulgaria, and as soon as he reached Paris there was no longer the need for him to use theatre and constructivism as a mode of expression and experimentation.

Paris was a very different world from the one he had left behind, and though he continued to support himself with portraits of the Parisian bourgeoisie, Christo became immediately aware of Tachisme which had reached its zenith and set an example for all Europe. (5)

Very shortly after his arrival he met Pierre Restany, an information officer for the government who wrote poetry and criticism and was becoming known for his association with Nouveau Realism. Christo showed Restany some of his work which had already left behind his socialist realist training. This new work dealt with found objects which he treated in various different manners. They were assemblages of artifacts that he called Inventory - bottles, tin-cans, boxes, oil drums that had been wrapped in resin steeped cloth and string, painted on or simply left to display some interesting surface or colour of their own.

Restany had just written his first manifesto for Nouveau Realists that April (6) and Christo, though not invited to join them, through his association with Restany came into contact with them. Though Christo's artistic vocabulary developed more or less independantly of the Nouveau Realists their importance in Paris and on Christo is not small. Nouveau Realism is one of the most important European art movements of the sixties and was worn of a discontent with the further possibilities of an abstract spontaneous art and with an involvement with the ordinary artifacts of an industrial and luxury-orientated civilization. Annette Michaelson said:-

"If anything defines French sensibility as expressed in its art and intellectual life, it is the enormous range of apprehension of reality which expresses itself in the respect for fact and in the open acceptance of the sensual on one hand, and in the possible transcendence on the other". (7)

Because of its philosophical implications, Nouveau Realism is often allied with pop art though it is more closely linked with the Dada and Surrealist tradition still existing in Paris, drawing from Duchamp's ready-mades (8).

However, the Nouveau Realists rarely let the chosen object speak for itself as Duchamp's ready-mades did.

For most of the artists associated with the movement, the transition of a single commercial image or object onto canvas without any apparent alteration was unthinkable, it would be too simple. In fact for a few years in the early sixties there was heated debate and rivalry between the pop artists and the nouveau realists about the artifacts and images of popular culture - whether they should be transformed in the nouveau realist manner or adopted more or less a L'Americane. The Parisian attitude towards nouveau realism was far more literary than the cool Anglo-American viewpoint which spurned group identification.

By fragmentation, juxtaposition or slight alteration the nouveau realists investéd their objects with touches of mystery and elegance. It was not the direct, banal, refreshing anonymity of urban reality that appealed to them, but the hitherto unrecognised strangeness latent in every common object, old or new. By transforming the function and often the appearance of an object, they created a subjective rather than an objective reality. Restany wrote of taking a

metaphysical look at technology and noted that his artists were concerned with quantative instead of qualified expression and respect for the intrinsic logic of the materials. He promulgated a sociological point of view that held little interest for pop artists.

Nouveau Realism set a model and provided the ambiance in which Christo's work could develop and come to the public's attention. Though the basic ideology and formal interests in Christo's work had already been formed prior to his arrival in Paris, it was through Restany and the nouveau realists that Christo clarified his thinking in the use of objects and their architectural potential (9).

On the surface there are enormous similarities between Christo's art and that of the nouveau realists. Their dual aim was to force or compel their audience to take a fresh look at things familiar to them yet uprooted from their ordinary existance, and ultimately to cause them to reflect upon the meaning of contemporary existance. On reflection, however, the formal and material comparisons between them seems less pertanent than the underlying similarities of outlook and ambition.

Though Klein was the key artist of the nouveau realists, there was little contact between him and Christo. But while they were two very different artists it would have been difficult for Christo to ignore the older man's personality and example in Paris. His energy reverberated

throughout Europe and it was in the invigorating climate of experimentation defined by Klein that Christo developed and began to express corresponding notions of his own.

It was in 1958 when he first arrived in Paris that he met his wife Jeanne-Claude de Villebeon who has remained a vital part of his life and work ever since. Without her administrative capabilities and commitment, his projects would never be realised.

From the time he arrived in Paris to the time he moved to New York, Christo's work steadily developed from its early socialist realist representation (via late tachiste preoccupation with textures and weathered surfaces) to a nouveau realist direct presentation of objects and staging of events. Very soon after his arrival in Paris he had started producing the small wrapped objects discussed earlier. From these first Inventories Christo began utilising life-size objects, wrapping tables, chairs, bicycles and even his own paintings using canvas or polythene bound with a mesh of string, rope or twine. He wrapped tables on top of which were objects that were packaged in such a way that their identity was obscured (10).

From around 1961 on, his work began to expand in scale and move outside the gallery space though still retaining strong links with it. In 1961 he showed Dockside Packages in

conjunction with his first one man show at the Gallerie Haro Lauhus in Cologne. Here he wrapped oil barrels in tarpaulin on a section of the waterfront near the gallery which on initial inspection appeared to be part of the environment. In the same year he drafted his project for a packed public to be :-

"Completely enclosed because it is packed on every side. The entrances will be underground, placed about fifteen or twenty meters from the building. The packaging will be rubberised tarpaulin and reinforced plastic material reinforced at average intervals of ten to twenty meters, by steel cables and ropes. The packed building could be used as:

1. Stadium with swimming pools, football field, olympic stadium or hockey and ice-skating rink.
2. Concert hall, conference hall, planetarium or experimental hall.
3. Historical museum, of ancient or modern art.
4. Parliament or prison." (11)

This was the first glimpse of the sort of direction that Christo's work was taking, here one can begin to see the signs of his preoccupation with scale in his present day work. At the same time he was attempting a temporary status for his art. In 1962 he assembled the Iron Curtain - Wall of Oil Barrels in the Rue Visconti, one of Paris's shortest and most historic streets. This was Christo's first event with tones of a political statement in it and a few important precedents were set: temporariness, teamwork, avoidance of accident, documentation, advance announcement of the event and an attempt to work within the law. He had moved in with a truckload of 240 barrels and stacked them



Wall of Oil Barels - Iron Curtain, Paris 27th June, 1962

into a 14 ft. pile, closing off the street completely, documenting the process and getting out barrels, trucks and all, in a mere seven hours.

The same year he had another exhibition in the galleria Apollinare in Milan, of collages of advertising and packaging slogans such as 'Packaging often ranks next to product in influence upon the buyer', 'We are deep in packaging, why not let our packaging people help you', and 'Westvaco packaging gives you impact, what else?' it protects, it innovates, trims costs'. In a second exhibition in Milan he nearly filled the gallery with one huge package. The exhibition was presented with very specific documentation, the streets listed, materials listed and a historical point of interest was quoted from a guide book in an attempt to recontextualise the wrapped object.

Christo's interest in wrapping can be traced to no one source though there are links with his early agit prop days. But as he has pointed out the practise is at least as old as the mummies. The idea of wrapping is in itself a means of preserving, enshrouding and protecting objects. The act of concealment does not completely destroy the identity of the object, but it demands our further recognition of the forms which lie beneath the wrapping. It is also a direct way of redefining the restlessness of different shapes

into a more unified amorphous one, and when Christo wraps architectural structures it can be seen as a way of humbling pompous monuments creating an air of mystery about them. (12) Because his wrappings have a distinctive air of ambiguity about them they also evoke a natural curiosity about their form and content. The fact that fabric can assume a human presence yet softens or conceals, is at the core of Christo's visual vocabulary because his work depends so much on the subliminal ambiguity inherent in any structure or form.

"Fabric exists like our skin, or like the leaf on a tree. The leaves on a tree fall off, and our skin can be broken. All the elements of tension - sometimes involving real fears and serious technical problems - are normal because we are dealing with very fragile but at the same time powerful material. In a way you can find that quality in sailors, who fight with the sails and the ocean's force. In the same way you can find persons on expeditions using cloth. It is very strange how fabric is a very important and singular part of any nomadic society. I love that element because it creates temporary, and not permanent, relations between things, its very ephemeral". (13)

In 1963 Christo made a group of Vitrines, showcases that had paper on the glass to hide the interior but with electric lights inside to attract attention to the designed function of display. Prior to this, his work had been characterised by textural contrasts, with the showcase he avoided any associative elements. Aluminium, glass, paper and electric light were used directly in a way that prefigures his subsequent work.

When he arrived in New York he made his first Store Front expanding the Vitrines to full architectural scale. The viewer's vision of inside was obscured in much the same way it would have been obscured by a window dresser draping a window. This re-contextualising of space was an attempt by Christo to convert the spectator's investigation of the object into an experience of themselves as an object in space. This attempt of his to stimulate the imagination by evoking disquiet through an otherwise neutral object is something which is constant in Christo, employing it in his subsequent work in a variety of ways.

Christo and Jeanne-Claude moved to New York in 1964 with impeccable timing. The European art scene was fading, and the nouveau realists had gone their separate ways. New York was now the centre of the art world beyond any doubt. As well as this Christo was beginning to realise some of his large scale temporary works for which he is best known and life in New York was easier and a lot cheaper for an artist who needed space, wholesale quantities of material and affordable machine shop services. Jeanne-Claude immediately laid siege on the New York art establishment.

The scale of Christo's work increased dramatically with this move with a number of collages and photomontages of wrapped Manhattan Skyscrapers. In 1968 he did two major projects which demonstrated his capacity to work on a huge scale,



5,600 Cubic Meter Package, Documenta 4, Kassel 1967/68

5,600 Cubic Meter Package in Documenta 4 and Kunsthalle Bern Packed, Switzerland, the former a 280 ft. high fabric tube filled with helium, the latter his first wrapped public building realising his ideal of a temporary monument.

It was at this time that Christo's preoccupation with the constant dissolution of the boundary's between art and everyday life began to play a major role in his creative process. Previously, though his work had here and there touched upon this, it had remained very much part of the art establishment system. The impulse towards a realisation on a gigantic scale, towards an art which lays itself open to the influence of a wide variety of uncontrollable forces, was in direct opposition to the developments of pop art and nouveau realism. Christo in moving to New York adopted a pragmatic thinking honing down his early socialism. This doctrine that estimates any association solely by its practical bearing on social interest is reinforced by his work within the system ethic which puts him at odds with a twentieth century avant-garde tradition of flouting society's petty rules and scorning business acumen.

Christo is full of contradictions, jumping from academia to the theatre in Sofia, to experimentation in Paris and onto a form of capitalism in New York. This has made him a difficult artist to assess when discussing his early years. It is only later as a mature artist that it is possible to

see with any clarity the different influences which have combined to form his aesthetic vocabulary.

Though the art world has always revelled in putting works into different neat labelled categories, Christo's projects have remained outside of established definitions. There is a strong element of theatricality in his work because of the transience of the physical construction which is an intrinsic part of his projects. Like public performances or happenings, they get attention both before and after their physical realisation. But they employ real time instead of the telescoped theatrical vision. Unlike theatre his work is not really a group event. Its organisation, the distribution of roles and the accomplishment remain his. The work never becomes a collaborative effort between partners in the Cage/Cunningham/Rauschenberg sense. Despite the fantastic trouble that other people take to make his projects happen, it remains very much a Christo.

"All happenings are make-believe situations, everything in my work is very strongly literal. If three hundred people are used, it is not because we want three hundred people to play roles, but because we have work for them If we use cranes, it's to do real work and the crane man must be conscientious or it will not work. My work may look very theatrical, but it is a very professional activity" (15

In the sixties and early seventies before the art world's attention was captured Christo was loosely associated with pop and minimal art. After this, his work was categorised

within the ill-defined realm of concept and process art to which he has never really belonged. Though for Christo the whole concept is an important element in his work, his work is very different to conceptual art in that he realises his plans and ideas. Christo rejects proposals for work that cannot be executed and physically experienced. Conceptual art, in his view, is a mental exercise, a grand speculation. Afraid of being caught between idea and execution, Christo has consistently refused to write about his work or speak about plans yet to be realised. Concepts for Christo reach the status of art only if they are carried out in real time and in real space with the objective of creating a work of art.

In the past sixteen years many of Christo's major works have dealt specifically with the environment which often led to his being categorised with earth and land art. There are many similarities between his work and a number of environmental artists who have also chosen to build corporate organisation in order to realise their work in the environment. Christo and land artists neither depict the landscape nor simply incorporate it as a backdrop for a self-contained sculptural object. Rather they engage the landscape as a sculptural material physically interacting with it. But Christo, unlike most land artists includes plans in all his projects for returning the land back to its former state after the project is realised.

In the end any analogy between Christo's work and that of other artists is self-defeating. Christo is primarily a post-modern artist. Even during the sixties and seventies which was a time of art 'isms', his work remained outside of any accepted categories. As an artist his work during the sixties and seventies was a forecast of the pluralism of the eighties.

FOOTNOTES CHAPTER 1

1. Werner Spies, Christo The Running Fence, p.6.
2. Christo dropped his surname when he moved to New York in 1964.
3. Sally Yard, Christo Oceanfront, p. 26.
4. The reason for the thirty year gap aside of his mothers influence has to do with the cold war. The 1940's and 50's communist revolution during the cold war was like the Bolshevik revolution in reverse. It began, not with a social revolutionary movement which then built up a police force so powerful that it turned the state into a police state, but with an all-powerful police force which then, controlled and manipulated by the communist party, carried out a social and economic revolution. Even then the socialism of the cold war spearheaded by the U.S.S.R. advocated, especially in the late 40's, a community spirit which is similar to constructivism. In Eastern Europe time Travels at a slower rate and the memory of the Russian constructivists was not relatively speaking that long ago. This meant that the constructivists dictum and their use of agit prop groups were not only seen as relevant to Bulgarias new communist regime, but was also ideologically suitable to the arts.
5. - A European movement closely allied with abstract expressionism and dealing with surfaces. Christo's work of this period shows an influence of Tachism through his use of texture.
6. Annette Newman 'Paris Letter ' Art International, No. 9 Vol VIII 1964 P. 59
7. The Nouveau Realists called their first Paris show in May 1961 "40 au-dessus (40 degrees above dada) emphatically announcing their strong links with Dada. This was not something which Duchamp agreed with. In a letter to Hans Richter he said:-

"This neo-dada, which they call new realism pop art, assemblage etc., it is an easy way out, and lives on what dada did. When I discovered ready-mades I thought to discourage aesthetics. In neo-dada they have taken my ready-mades and found aesthetic beauty in them. I threw the bottle rack and urinal in their faces as a challenge and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty".

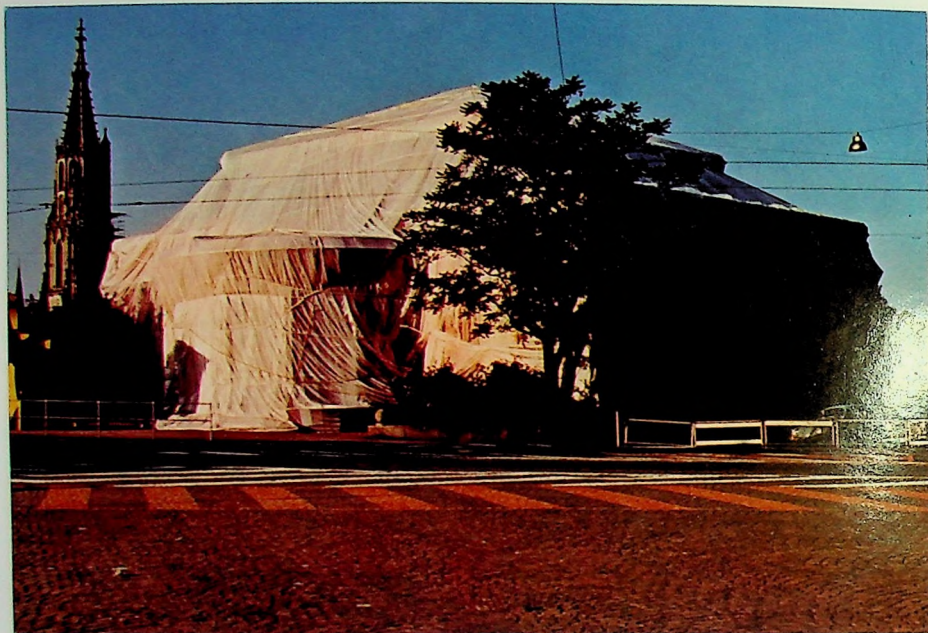
8. Nikos Stangos, Ed. Concepts of modern art, p.227
9. Pierre Restany in his catalogue introduction, 'Christo et ses alignements' for Christo's 1961 exhibition at the Gallerie Haro Lauhus, identified Christo's two ways of dealing with objects, those of packaging and accumulation. Attributing singular monumentality to Christo's accumulation of oil barrels, Restany felt that Christo, "ought to involve himself completely in the development of this free form architecture" Catalogue - Collection on loan from the Rothschild Bank A.G. Zurich p 68.
10. It has been noted by William Rubin and later by Lawrence Alloway in his article of March '71 in Studio International that there is a strong resemblance between Christo's early work and Man Ray's, Enigma of Isidore Ducasse of 1920. This photographic work consisted of a mysterious shape (in actuality a sewing machine) wrapped in sacking and tied with cord. Isidore Ducasse was a 19th century writer whose physical appearance was never recorded. She wrote under the name of Comte de Lautreamont and was a surrealist diety. Though Alloway sees Man Ray's work in many respects as an anticipation of Christo's inventory's, the exoticism of Man Ray's silhouette is in strong contrast to the almost rectilinear work of Christo. Also Calvin Tomkins noted in 'Running Fence' that Christo's early work appears to have been inspired by a Miro collage he saw in Prague while studying under Emil Burin.
11. Alloway, Lawrence - Studio International, March 1971, pp 98/99
12. Christo was by this time beginning to explore Pierre Restany's advice about concentrating on architectural scale using the temporary monuments as a method of exploring the concept of architectural scale in his work.
13. Yard, Sally - Christo Oceanfront. p 2.
14. Until recently, Christo has always recieved more support from the European art market than the American one.
15. Bourdon, David, Christo p. 25

CHAPTER II

In January 1969 Christo wrapped The Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago at the invitation of its curator Jan Van Der Marck.. Christo had first proposed to wrap a large building in 1961 (see Chapter I p.16) but it was not until 1968 when he wrapped the Kunsthalle Bern to commemorate its 50th anniversary, that he was given an opportunity to realise his early proposal. That same year he presented plans to wrap The Museum of Modern Art in New York, but when the controversial project was curbed by the local police, fire authorities and insurance agencies, the Museum instead displayed an exhibition of the project illustrated by a large photomontage, drawings and six scale models.

When he was asked by Van der Marck to do an exhibition at the new Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, Christo who was having a show at a nearby commercial gallery, suggested wrapping the museum inside and out. The building is a one-story edifice (with a below ground gallery) of little architectual merit; built in the early 1900's it had once been a bakery and later the headquarters of Play Enterprises. Christo considered the building:

"Perfect, (because) it looks like a package already, very anonymous, its facade is a false wall covering the original structure". (1)



Wrapped Kunsthalla, Bern, Switzerland, 1968

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Christo began wrapping the building on 15th January 1969. Assisted for two days on the outside of the building by volunteer students from the Chicago Art Institute and the Institute of Design, Christo covered three of the external sides of the building in 10,000 sq. ft. of heavy brown tarpaulin, tied with 4,000 ft. of rope. By using brown tarpaulin instead of the transparent plastic used in wrapping the Kunsthalle Bern, Christo hoped to give a greater physical presence to the building creating a contrast to the snow on the ground. The Museum signpost and a 36ft.maple tree beside the building were wrapped in semi-transparent polythene. Inside the floor and stairs, approximately 2,800 sq. ft. were covered in painter's used drop cloths which were loosely laid overlapping one another and secured to the pillars within the space by ropes. The white walls remained untouched. Every precaution was taken to ensure the public's safety, no exits were covered (there were no windows), and small openings were cut in the tarpaulin to keep the building's air-vents unobstructed.

The result of this formidable task was to collectively pose a series of questions to the art establishment in one move. Working within the gallery, working outside the gallery, the temporary in art and the preciousness of the art object and the environment within which it is contained - the gallery or museum.

Before analysing any of these issues it is essential to get some idea of the political and artistic climate in America during the sixties. It was primarily a decade of strong social commitment. The Equal Rights movement gathered force, nuclear power was a major issue, the Vietnam War had raised considerable political unrest with anti-war demonstrations and peace movements flourished. In the visual arts not only was it an age of movements - Pop, Op, Minimal, Conceptual, Colour Field and many others, but there was also a growing desire among artists to find ways of avoiding the traditional elitist position of art in society. Many artists found themselves uninterested or morally opposed to the traditional values of style and content. Others wanted to circumvent and come to ridicule the market system it engendered. Still others felt confined by the gallery space itself. This was realised by a rush of gallery gestures at the end of the sixties which continued sporodically through the seventies. These gestures embraced a whole range of ideological criticisms ranging from socio-political to aesthetic debates which were used by the artists to reflect their disbelief in the whole art system. One of the most important points raised by these artists was the extremely complex question, what is art and what is the role of art in society?

It is generally agreed that the term art, is understood to mean a creative act by an individual or group culminating in a finished product which is then presented to the public

through a variety of means. In the case of the visual arts the creative act is primarily a solitary one. This in turn means that public consumption of the art object through its very nature is also a solitary act. This in itself is totally acceptable, however, with the advent of modernism and through it abstraction, art became increasingly difficult to digest without a reasonable knowledge of modern art. This, by default, created a public which became increasingly elitist allowing little room or understanding for an uneducated art public. It is this issue which Christo, and many others like him, tried to overcome.

Most of the work done in this context comes under the increasingly broad definition of sculpture which within its own sphere asks the questions, what is sculpture today? What does it mean, in what form and in whose space?. First of all sculpture, prior to the 19th century, rested on the pedestal of public representation when it was used as a pedagogic tool by the church and state to illustrate religious stories and morals in an age when few people could read or write. Today , sculpture no longer plays the dialectic memorial role of previous centuries. Instead it exist's primarily in a world of aesthetics inhabiting an uncertain space in the world. Recognising the pointlessness of sculpture continuing to exist in such a closely defined category, artist s attempted to broaden not only the sculptural context of a work, but also the content.

Recognising the fact that the artist's role in society was rarely questioned or even properly considered outside of the established cultural haven of the fine art critical context, these artists through a wide range of mediums attempted to re-contextualise and enlarge the scope of modern art, or to be more specific, to examine the idea of public meaning in art. Naturally, this meant a complete re-examination of the art establishment and its relation to the outside world.

Immateriality and impermanance were the main strategies used by artists to dematerialise the art object. It is within this area that the work of Christo plays a major role. In recognising the fact that all too often art is viewed as a commodity acceptable only to the educated and wealthy, Christo was aware that modern art when viewed in a gallery situation is looked upon with awe. The object is seen as precious and because it is usually contained within a sterile, immaculate and silent environment which reflects this preciousness, the environment becomes precious by association.

It is within this context that Christo's gesture was perceived by the art establishment. It is here that the paradox of the work lies. Though Van der Marck in offering the museum as a subject for examination was in perfect accord with modernist practice - to test the premise of every assumption and to subject them to argument, the form in which Christo presented his ideas had problems. This lay

in the fact that advanced aesthetics and political subtlety are often confusing to an uninvolved audience and, because Christo took the building out of the world of everyday useage and elevated it into the world of art, one wonders how many people outside of the immediate art world really understood the gesture. This happened because when Christo wrapped The Museum of Contemporary Art, he was also symbolically wrapping its staff and functions - the sales desk, the maintenance staff and also by implication the trustees. That the floor and stairs were wrapped indicated a paralysis of function. Ultimately what Christo presented to the public was a huge precious work of art which encompassed by association, not only the building, but all that was associated with it.

"Since the object or building has not been affected or transformed and since the wrapping is a mechanical and not a stylistic devise, we must conclude that it is not the wrapping per se but rather the artist's decision to intervene and transform a given object or building from a found object to a chosen context that elevates it to the level of art". (2)

Christo's gesture caused the museum to become a work of art and no longer a container of art, and more than that it became not an empty wrapped package, but rather even more a place of worship than it had been before because it was recieved within an existing fine art category. This contradicts the notion of criticising the gallery system and its elitist position in today's society. This meant that any statement

Christo was making about the art establishment for the public was for the most part only understood by the art world. Ultimately, when compared to the extraordinary things that actually happen in cities, where buildings are wrapped in polythene to be cleaned and repaired, Christo's gesture was in danger of looking imposed and stylish becoming a piece of sophistry.

The obvious danger in this work lies in Christo's utilisation of this common spectacle. The assumption inherent in the work is that everything becomes art. But when everything becomes art, art becomes nothing because it would be impossible for anyone to form a concept of something which is so totally open that all attributes apply to it equally.

Art is by its very nature self-contained, thus Christo's gesture could be seen to deprive art of direction and purpose, until like an unwound clock it simply loses its capacity to work. On the other hand, by wrapping The Museum of Contemporary Art, Christo does attempt to overcome some of the issues raised in the debate over the role of art in today's society without resorting to the baroque monumentality of some of the work intended for public sites.

By wrapping the exterior of the museum as well as the interior, Christo involved the casual passerby focusing attention on the actual building itself as opposed to its contents. This meant that the function of the building

was highlighted because his treatment of it contrasted with its normal functional use. He presented to the public the logical visual explanation of what is commonly believed to be the general public's view of modern art - something which is untouchable and unobtainable. There is no denying that as a gesture within itself, wrapping the Museum of Contemporary Art was one of the more vocal statements made within and about the art establishment. It certainly negotiated a deeper understanding of a major theme of the 1960's and 1970's, the isolation, description and exposure of the structure through which art is passed, including what happens to it in the process.

Art objects of the past have traditionally been intended to last. This is indicated by the range of materials used such as wood, stone and metal. Today this is no longer an essential part of modern art, a crucial aspect of Christo's entire aesthetic is the contradictory notion of the temporary monument. It is a term which he first applied to his work referring to Dockside Packages placed on the Cologne waterfront in 1961. Christo chooses to design projects that inherently raise the issue of how long they can physically survive. In part legal and economic constraints determine their duration, since the necessary permits to construct the projects have been contingent upon a fixed life span. In addition the materials themselves partially influence the time period.

"I love fabric because it creates temporary and not permanent relationships between things. It is very ephemeral the fabric lends dynamic form to my projects, because you know very well it is not going to remain forever, and it will be removed". (3)

The temporary nature of Christo's art is in itself an important issue for it raises the point - how valid is the permanent art object? Obviously this very much depends, not only on the object itself, but on the context within which it is made. Most art is not of a temporary nature regardless of the fact that once it passes out of a contemporary context and takes its place in art history, it loses its immediate relevance to the society within which it is made. This is one of the reasons for the temporary nature of Christo's work, though it is not an overriding factor because process for Christo is so important. Once the project is completed it is over. The work has served its purpose and there is no need for it to remain any longer than its stated length of time, (usually two weeks). Christo firmly believes that there is a magic in the fact that each project disappears so quickly, leaving only a memory. In part finance also determines the length of a project for the cost of keeping a work in situ longer than the specified time would, he believes, cause unnecessary expense.

There is another aspect of the temporary in Christo's art which is important especially in the specific case of The Museum of Contemporary Art. When Christo wrapped the

museum he was, in effect, reflecting society's methods of showing art whereby the public is allowed a few brief weeks in which to view work which can have taken many months to make. This means of course that the context of a lot of art is revealed in time and circumstances - dictated by the gallery alone. Christo, through the very nature of the work, achieves a *fait accompli*, regardless of whether the gallery or museum wants it or not the work only remains a concrete reality for the time that the work alone dictates. In doing this Christo has effectively produced work in direct contrast to the established premise of the permanent art object.

This is one of the factors which raises so much controversy around Christo's projects. He places great importance on the dialogue he has with the public. This dialogue in turn is fed through the controversy his work engenders which is in its turn fed by the media. (4) Christo sees his projects as having three main periods or steps. The first period which he refers to as the software period, is when the project is only visible in the drawings, propositions, scale models, legal applications and technical data. This is the projection of how the project will look. The second period is the hardware period with the realisation of the project. In the end the hardware period is like a mirror showing what has been projected.

"The realised work of art ... is the accumulation of a variety of forces, formal, visual, symbolic, political, social and historical The physical making of the work is probably the most enjoyable and rewarding because it is (in many cases), the crowning of many year's expectations". (5)

The third period which can also be seen as a software period, and the one which lasts, is the documentation of the project. This is essential to his work because his major projects are usually experienced after they exist due to their short life and Christo attaches great importance to it. In fact, his complete and careful documentation through photography, text and video reveals his serious and persisting interest in preserving the projects for posterity. This means that his idea of impermanence is partially deflected because it in reality preserves (and in many cases anticipates) Christo's work. Indeed when Christo lived in Paris he went to great lengths to preserve his objects, transporting them across the city to be stored in a warehouse. All this means that the debate that is generated through Christo's projects continue long after their physical realisation because reproduction, though not the chief cause of our intellectualising of art, is its chief instrument.

The documentation techniques used by Christo are identical to those used by the media. This means that Christo's dependancy on extensive documentation is fraught with problems. These lie in the nature of the media itself. Contrary to what is generally expected, documentary techniques whether it be recording a work of art or reporting a news

item are never objective. At best they are pseudo-events, stage managed operations that present themselves as real but are rigged and contrived as any theatrical performance. This insinuates that the documentary evidence of Christo's projects are to an extent untrue, not purposely, but rather by default. One can assume that the euphoric reportage of some of Christo's more spectacular events such as Running Fence, hides the probably considerable discomfort of being there. On the other hand -

"The central truth about newspapers (is) that they cannot go beyond the range of their readers. It is therefore the readers, in the end, who are the figures of power The broad shape and nature of the press is ultimately determined by no one but its readers". (6)

This implies that any documentation that Christo undergoes in relation to his projects is instinctively geared around the public's desires. Having said this it must also be assumed that Christo's documentation is as much for himself as for the public. Therefore judging by the scale of documentation, one can assume that Christo's desire for impermanence is not a political issue dealing with the de-materialisation of art, but rather an aesthetic one.

This is reinforced by his utilisation of the commercial gallery system when he sells his drawings, collages and photomontages in order to fund his projects. They are in effect technical drawings. In them he utilises his early training received at the Sofia Academy of Art in Bulgaria.

They are technically brilliant and the dialectic clarity and legibility visible in the work is immediately obvious to an un-educated eye, anyone can understand his drawings. In this respect he differs from many contemporary artist. His creative input is concentrated solely on the realisation of each project. The drawings in essence, which are to explain each project, are of relatively little interest compared to the actual work itself. Without the completed projects there to refer to, they would, in fact, be of little artistic interest. This has nothing to do with the quality of the drawings themselves but rather with the fact that his iconography is not particularly rich. Other mediums of our time such as film or photography are often more effective, especially in the context of Christo's philosophical approach to art. Over the past twenty years there has been surprisingly little development in his drawing which one would expect not only through its immediacy as a medium, but also through the constant exposure to the art world. One suspects that Christo has never been able to completely move away from his early training, or more to the point to push it beyond its present state. In effect the drawings, though part of the projects which are of a controversial nature in terms of their scale and public involvement, do not challenge themselves.

Christo's ambitions are so grand and their cost so great that he must be exceptionally prolific:-

"Twenty or thirty years ago, dealers in New York used to struggle against dealers in Paris or London, each affirming the national superiority of their artists. These transatlantic squabbles are now extinct. What you have instead, on the international model, is associations of galleries selling the one product in New York, London, Dusseldorf, Paris, Milan. The tensions of national schools are dissolved. But this means that the successful artists must work on an industrial scale". (7)

This quote though not necessarily relevant to Christo, could in essence explain the lack of innovation in his work. The problem could possibly lie in the fact that he has not had the time in which to stop and explore this medium. This does not mean that the drawings are not of a high quality. They are aesthetically very beautiful.

With this in mind one wonders whether Christo is making corporate art or is he making essentially ironic gestures towards the art establishment through his drawing. The kind of delirium that is needed to carry out his projects denies this, but at the same time when one examines his work, it is with this in mind that questions are asked.

When an artist wraps an art museum the gesture is obvious, but when at the same time the artist utilises the very system he is criticising, the gesture loses its potency. For the outside spectator the project could be seen as nothing more than a throwaway remark of little lasting value.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER II

1. Exerpt from a handout written by David Bourdon, sent by the artist.
2. Jan Van der March 'Why wrap a Museum', Arts Canada October 1969, pp 34/35
3. Sally Yard, Christo Ocean Front, p 27
4. There was little controversy about the Museum of Contemporary Art. The fact that he had no opposition to the project meant that it had little of the resounding publicity and impact that his later works had.
5. Catalogue: Christo wrapped Reichstag project for Berlin p 24.
6. Michael Gurevitch, Tony Bennett, James Curran, Janet Woollacott (Ed.), Culture, Society and the Media, p 129.
7. Robert Hughes - Art Monthly, Dec/Jan 1984/85, p 11

CHAPTER III

In any discussion of Christo's work the question of scale is of crucial importance. The dictionary still defines it as 'The proportion which the representation of an object bears itself'. Nowadays, a work of art can act in many one of several kinds of scale - time, (as in film, video and story), rapidity and in ease of dissemination, (as in printmaking, phamphleteering, photographic reproduction and circulation through the mail), the size and nature of the chosen audiences and the extent to which the work penetrates the socio-political context in which it is created. In other words, the scale of a work of art can be measured by its effect of its predetermined arc of action - where it attempts to go, the issues it tries to confront, its chosen audiences, as well as actual physical size.

In Christo's projects, scale is essential to their visual appearance and to the complex social context of their realisation. Through it we are continually reminded, visually as well as by documentation, of the extensive dimensions and cost of materials and labour, as well as the engineering complexity and sometimes the real danger in actual construction. In fact, scale in Christo's art is much more than a matter of physical size where it becomses a decision of mind, not of hand. In this way any criticism

of Christo is deficient when it confines itself to formal issues, ignoring the decisions that determine content through the issue of scale.

In 1976 Christo's Running Fence project was realised. Though it was not his first major land work it was at this stage by far the most beautiful and certainly the most controversial. Christo had had offers to build the fence in Mexico and South Africa from large landowners there, but had refused, feeling that he would not have the rich social texture and contrasts of America.

"We would be cheating if I go to some rich friend in South Africa and build this fence on fifty or a hundred miles of hills. There would be no relation to the work. The work would be non-existent the work had that impact only because it is nourished on the power it carried itself". (1)

Christo was very specific about the location of the fence. He wanted it to start in the ocean, cross rolling hills with few trees and cross or circumvent roads, farmhouses and different kinds of animal fences. AT the other end it had to cross a freeway. He travelled 1,000's of miles along the West coast to choose the site and the length of the fence was determined by his final choice. In the end the 18 ft. high fence ran for 24½ miles, starting in the Pacific Ocean, running across Marin and Sonoma counties in California.

It consisted of 2,000,000 sq. ft. of white woven nylon fabric, 90 miles of steel cables and 2,050 steel poles.

Comparisons are often made between the great wall of China and Christo's Running Fence and he has always expressed admiration for it acknowledging the connection. However, the idea for the fence was born in the late sixties, when he came across a photograph for a low erosion control fence made of polypropylene ribbon fabric. He also saw a similar fence in Australia - a three foot high, freestanding dune fence holding back sand. The way the cloth sagged between the posts appealed to him, and he designed his fence with enough slack for the fabric to billow out four feet on either side.

Christo did not think of his fence as a barrier, a medium of separation any more than he thought of it as a fence. As in all his large scale projects, its aim was to define and illuminate the environment, and contrary to his previous wrapped works, it was the exact opposite of concealing. It was an ambiguous scheme, there being no possible view of it as a whole and from close up the fence became a wall, from a distance and seen from the air, it became an abstract line.



Running Fence, California, 1972/76

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"Running Fence is a celebration of the landscape. The fabric is a light conductor for the sunlight, and it will give shape to the wind, it will go over the hills and into the sea like a ribbon of light". (2)

There is something undeniably captivating in the image of the fence snaking its way through the landscape like a ribbon of light. Contrary to the size of it, the fence did not overwhelm the landscape. Rather it was created Christo said, with the idea of going through - as an invitation to look at the landscape in a new way. In fact, though one would assume that its scale would deny this, it became an object of contemplation and reverie. In many ways it is comparable to the iconography of the American landscape art of the thirties, especially in the paintings of Grant Wood, (Fall Plowing, 1931, Spring Turning, 1936)

For most artists who give process an important place in the creative act the question of aesthetics does not usually play a major role, but Christo's work, especially from the seventies on has had a high degree of aesthetic awareness running through it. Though it is partially the scale of the work that determines its aesthetic impact, one can assume that Christo is aware that without any appearance of beauty, his projects would have considerably less support from the public. This means that aesthetics has as important a place in his creative process as the actual process itself.

Christo succeeds in realising his grand ideas because, after the initial idea has been conceived, his work takes the form of purely technical projects thus making their realisation more feasible. To do this Christo and his wife Jeanne-Claude have set up the CVJ Corporation through which the work is realised - very much along the lines that Robert Smithson and Michael Heizer realise their large scale works.

The practical problems in building the Running Fence were formidable ranging from deals with the law, financing the whole project to the actual erection of the fence itself, none of which could have been achieved without the considerable administrative skill and back-up of Jeanne-Claude. Christo takes great pride in the fact that his vast projects are funded by himself. He accepts no grants or sponsors, and the money for each project is realised through the sale of numerous drawings, collages and prints within the art establishment. The projects need a massive infusion of capital. This is where Jeanne-Claude comes in. Since 1970, the time of Valley Curtain, she has been president and treasurer of the CVJ Corporation, which has as its assets all the artists unsold works and receives all the money from their sale as well as being charged with the costs of each project. (3) Christo himself holds the title of Assistant Secretary, and is paid a salary of \$25,000 a year by the company in return for which he has to produce enough drawings to finance each project. Once a project has its requisit

approvals and is at the brink of its most capital intensive stage, Jeanne-Claude sends out about a hundred letters offering 'purchasing subscribers', the chance to buy drawings at a discount in exchange for cash.

In the case of Running Fence, subscribers had to make an upfront payment for drawings valued at \$33,500 but for which they would receive a 40% discount on the work if they paid for it before 30th April 1974. Although less than a third responded affirmatively, this resulted in \$ 700,000 worth of purchases. As the fence was originally budgeted at \$400,000, less than half the cost of Valley Curtain, this amount seemed more than adequate. (4) However, the final cost of the Running Fence amounted to \$3,200,000. (5)

Though one would imagine that the main reason for Christo's insistence on his projects being personally funded, and his refusal to accept any assistance in the form of sponsorship or grants, is because he does not wish to rely on State funding or draw money from a local community, his reason is less altruistic. By funding his vast projects himself, he is able to do what he wants to do when he wants to do it. No one can dictate to him:

"It costs so much of my life and blood that I don't want to give any milimeter of credit for that project to anybody else". (6)

Though this rather possessive attitude of Christo's to his work could be seen as a serious flaw, especially when viewing it in the context with his concern for public involvement, in actual fact it makes sense when you look at it along side the creative act. In Chapter II, I have discussed how Christo manages to circumvent the art establishments domination of the art object once it passes out of the artist's studio. In effect, Christo, by refusing to accept any outside financial assistance, has ensured that the work continues to be seen within the context that he defines. This does not in any way dilute the importance of public involvement in his work, rather it intensifies it into an immensely personal experience for the public.

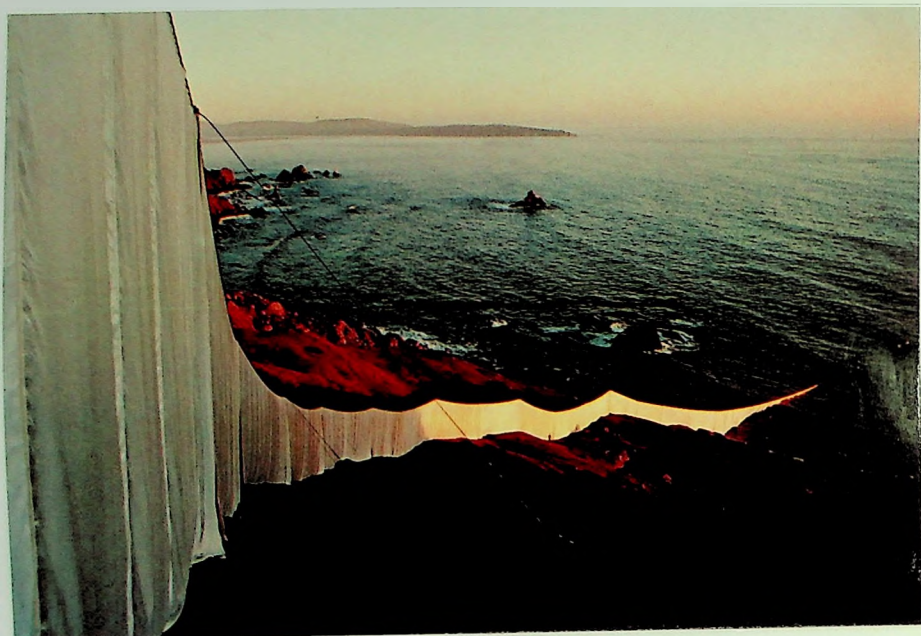
Process is an essential ingredient in Christo's art. He places not only a great importance on how and why people become involved in his work, but also on the actual physical organisation and construction of a project. He tries to involve as many different aspects of life into his work without moving away from reality. It is this philosophy that has made him always make a point of dealing with the proper government channels when seeking permission to do his work. Running Fence was approached in much the same way that a highway authority would approach building a road, or a developer would plan an industrial estate. Thousands of dollars were spent on preparing environmental impact reports

and testifying before zoning boards. Insurance policies to a total of \$3,000,000 were taken out to protect the counties treasures in case of lawsuits resulting from damage or injuries related to the Running Fence, and \$87,000 was paid out just to obtain necessary permits.

At one stage Christo ran into difficulties over permission to run the fence into the ocean. The Californian Coastal Zone Conservation Commission which had jurisdiction over everything constructed along the entire 1,072 miles of the Californian coastline was very reluctant to give him permission. Because he was determined to finish this part of the fence before any injunction came, he secretly constructed it in the early hours of the morning. This meant that he could comply with the law by agreeing to take it down, whereas if he recieved an injunction and continued on building the fence, he would be acting in contempt of court,

"My good name as an artist is more important. I cheat the law than I cheat my art, if don't go to the ocean I will be criticised for years and rightly so". (7)

It could be argued that Christo's disregard of the regulations undermined the premise of him projects which was avowedly to reveal and not to circumvent the economical, social and political structures governing the landscape. Christo has always said that his intricate dealings with the local by-laws and environmental clauses is part of his process of gaining complete consent from local communities involved in whatever



Running Fence, California, 1972/76

area he is working. Therefore, this action was a definite infringement on people's rights to be able to have a say about their environment. On the other hand it can be argued that not only did Christo's action increase the dialogue about his work, but that it was also part of the process. As well as this, that part of the fence was an important factor in its actual aesthetic conception as a whole, and without it, Running Fence would have been incomplete. Neither of course, was he breaking the law.

Christo's work proceeds on the assumption that the most important contribution of art is its impact on the on going development of thought, and that the object itself has little worth once its historical effect has been achieved. In his somewhat Duchampian view, this interaction constitutes a definative part of the art experience. He has said:-

"I don't believe any work of art exists outside of its present time, when the artist likes to do it, when the social, political, environmental times fit together". (8)

The temporary nature of his work reinforces this, though because of his extensive documentation, it will in the future be possible to view his work outside of its contemporary context within which it was intended. This means that the transformation of the physical construction is a factor in the transformation of Christo's work into something

like public performance which gains attention both prior to its physical realisation and after its physical demise. Hence, the artifacts which include the process and the actual site, are but two elements in the work which then ceases to be a mere physical construction on a natural site, but a project with extended temporal boundaries whereby the social context of its realisation takes on aesthetic impact.

The aesthetic status of Christo's work and his conception of the extended project as a work of art is theoretically controversial because society not only sees art as something that transcends time, language and culture, it also views art as a very individual experience. No one could deny that Christo's art is, in aesthetic terms, highly individual. On the other hand the process by which it is absorbed by the public is not a solitary one. This is Christo's greatest challenge to the art world. The scale of his work in terms of the public's response to it, is in direct response to his dialogue with his audience where, beyond any accepted boundaries, he encourages and manipulates public debates and involvement in his work as an inherent part of it. The large audiences that Christo attracts are part of his working scale, without them one of the most important elements of his work would disappear.

Christo's very public profile is one which is viewed with deep mistrust by a wide range of people, not only in the general public, but also within art circles. Thomas Hoving, editor-in-chief of Connoisseur, wrote that:

" Christo has exposed 20th century art as limitlessly fascinating, infinitely imaginative, technically breathtaking, and at the same time, shallow, vapid and discouragingly devoid of human values". (9)

In fact the actual controversies surrounding his projects have been confined largely to the environmental implications of the constructions, viewed as incursions on relatively pristine settings. Although objections usually take the form of legal recourse through challenging the environmental impact of the work itself, one cannot help but think that critics believe Christo is engaged on an aesthetic affront to nature that goes deeper than the scientific assessment of environmental implications. This raises the question of whether they are destructive to their setting within the aesthetic context. First of all, in terms of a biological disturbance to a site, Christo consistently ensures that his projects will not in any way interfere with the ecological and physical qualities of the area. For the Running Fence a 450 page environmental impact report was commissioned which covered every area that the fence could possibly effect, ranging from the preservation of historical monuments to catering for human waste. Any arguments that Christo's projects are an aesthetic disturbance to a site are relatively futile. For a start his projects are not permanent and no trace

of the work is left after its demise, and secondly, in the case of the Running Fence, no one can deny its beauty.

At the same time Christo's projects are not merely peaceful co-existant artifactual appendages to the site, in fact they forcibly assert themselves over their site by their size, their engineering complexity and their synthetic components. This is done, not through the actual physicality of the work, but rather through the controversy which surrounds it.

The controversy over the Running Fence was vast and very bitter coming from within the local communities, many of them artists. They felt that his monumental infringement onto their privacy and their land and was one which was purely personal with little regard for their accepted view of the land. In many respects the criticisms of these people was right, because most will resent someone who comes into their environment who proposes to change it on a monumental scale. Yet their accusations not only of infringement, but also of theatricality, refused to allow for the fact that most art that has any impact must by necessity raise issues. Hence, through the controversy raised over the Running Fence Christo achieved his aim of illuminating the environment and forcing people to re-examine themselves in relation to it.

"The arrogance of the minamilists (referring to the local artists) here! I think all the power and force of art comes from real life, that the work must be part

of real life. That it cannot be seperated. It is because my Running Fence is rooted in everyday life that it gains so much force. Its space is not physical but mental. Some people say I make theatre art, but it is not theatre because there is not one element of makebelieve anywhere. All is reality, everything really happens". (10)

Another part of the controversy which interestingly enough when you consider America's peculiar 'throw-away' consumer mentality, dealt with the expenditure of such massive infusion of capital on something which was so temporary. Prior to the 20th century, society required that art be eternal, and even today there is relatively little understanding about 20th century artist's attempts to dematerialise art. Few could comprehend the logic behind Christo's gesture, and the phenominal cost of the Running Fence outraged People. This was partly to do with the economic climate of the area which had an unemployment figure of 12%. People felt that the fence was a waste of energy and materials at a time when they were at a low ebb economically.

In fact it has been pointed out that Christo's project was not only economically complex but economically productive even though it had no traditional economic purpose. Christo's money may have gone a lot further than the capital invested in a typical film project or a sports promotion. The \$3,200.000 spent on the Running Fence was probably multiplied into some \$9,000,000 of economic benefits as the workers, contractors, film makers, photographers, publishers, landowners and others who worked on the project or lived in the area spent the money they earned and developed their own projects out of it. (11)

Christo has often declared that he welcomes the controversy and complaints because it enriches his work. At the conclusion of the last legal battle over the Running Fence, he announced to the bitterly divided courtroom audience that every man and woman there had become an ingredient in his art.

Harold Rosenberg's phrase 'anxious object' which he used to describe the kind of modern art that makes us uneasy because of uncertainty as whether one is in the presence of a genuine work of art is particularly apt when discussing Christo's relationship with the public. Anxious objects raise questions about what we know and perceive, creating a situation of tension which forces an audience to examine routine responses and to discriminate. Ideally they are part of a process in which the audience interprets what they see rather than just view - this is Christo's main object - the questioning, examination and involvement of as many people as possible in his work.

Anxiety over Christo's art could be caused by its peculiar relationship to cinema in that to a great extent he anticipates it. But because cinema is viewed on a different level to art, especially by the general public, this relationship is difficult to recognise. The similarity is caused through the scale of the work, especially in the case of Running Fence where it very much embraces the panoramic vision much used in film. Another similarity with cinema is in the use of time, and as well as that

in the broad spectrum of people involved in both the making of the work and in the audiences they embrace. But because Christo only uses the medium of film in his documentation, the cinematic effects that are achieved through his working process is subliminal. The influence that cinematic scale may have had on Christo , even if it is not a public part of his art, has had a wide effect on the people's attitude to it. Particularly in America when you bear in mind that quantity is something that they find particularly real, and Christo's art is very much part of american culture though he comes from a European tradition. The American appreciation of spectacle which of course Christo provides, has played a major role in the country's film industry and this too reinforces the link between Christo and film. However, not only the audience, but also the understanding that these two require are very different. Films are made not only to entertain but also to make money. Christo's art is only indirectly financially productive, and he himself does not benefit from it in the same way that a producer or director of a film would. And most important, the entertainment value that people place on art is very different to that of film. Film, without the public's acknowledgement would be a flop because of the industrie's dependancy on box office returns. In the case of Christo, though his projects are concieved and executed with a broader public in mind than is usual in the art world, in fact the real audience is of course, the international art community, which views the work, in this case the Running Fence, from afar through documentation.

The workers and the landscape are employed simply as a means towards an end that has nothing to do with them in any deep or permanent sense to produce a Christo. In fact as Brian O'Doherty said:-

"Christo's works mimic in scale the good works of government, they provide the useless at great expense". (12)

Contemporary criticism is often blinded by extremes of scale, and rhetorical attitudes are always attached to works that expand or contract beyond the usual. Sheer size alone is irresponsible, and gestures such as Christo's which endorse the notion that any art is justifiable if it ends in art are wrong when the end result does not effectively pose issues beyond those of utopian ideology. Critics have opposed Christo on the grounds that he uses life issues as simple art materials. But since art is an activity encircled by life upon which it depends, this attitude is self indulgent. Running Fence is redeemed through the fusion of Christo's ego with great aesthetic beauty, and again and again there are illustrations of how the public's completely furious out-of-hand rejection at the beginning of the projects ultimately adds to the works acceptance, where the spectator is deflected from a position of resistance to one of fascination.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER III

1. Alan Sonfist, (Ed.) - Art in the Land, a Critical Anthology of Environmental Art, p .207
2. Calvin Tomkins, Christo, p. 16
3. Originally charted in Illinois, the company is registered in other states as the projects require.
4. Over the years, Christo has sold primarily to four or five private dealers most of them European, and directly to museums and collectors. The system apparently works so smoothly that at the time of Surrounded Islands, Christo was able to qualify for an impressive \$700,000 worth of loans from Citi-Bank.
5. The following breakdown shows how the money was spent:

Engineering and Construction - \$176,791.58 (one of the first things the Running Fence corporation commissioned was an environmental report which cost \$39,000)

Fabric - \$159,090.06

Construction - \$1,766,789.50 (for the six months leading up to the project the Corporation had sixty workers on the project, for the actual construction of the fence Christo hired 360 people most of them students at \$20.00 a day for two weeks)

Documentation, Advertising, Promotion - \$272,547.13

Travel - \$113,987.76

Shipping and Storage - \$34,109.01 (when the fabric for the fence was brought to the site it was stored in a secret location for fear of sabotage from the local organisation against the project)

Framing - \$48,757.01

Fees - \$46,398.06 (secretarial and project management)

Telephone - \$16,171.08

Legal and Accountancy - \$233,143.55 (the Running Fence Corporation eventually had nine lawyers).

Rent - \$57,521.83 (to the ranchers in addition after the fence was removed the ranchers recieved the steel poles, cables and fabric used on their land. Christo had offered them the choice of a colour TV set, a fridge or a freezer. Most ranchers already had them so the offer was changed to \$250, a few wanted more money, one asked for and got \$6,000.)

6. Galvin Tomkins - Christo p 32
7. ibid. p 18
8. J.Finberg 'Theatre of the Real: Thoughts on Christo' Art in America, August 1976, p. 97
9. Lisbet Nilson, 'Christo Blossoms in the Sky', Art News, January 1984, p. 59
10. Galvin Tomkins, Christo, p. 19
11. Alan Sonfist - Art in the Land, A Critical Anthology of Environmental art, PP. 85-91
12. Brian O'Doherty 'The gallery as a gesture', Art Forum December 1981, p. 32.

CHAPTER IV

When looking at Christo's work one has to constantly bear in mind that he is an artist who repeatedly impresses upon us his wish to involve as many people as possible in his projects. The Reichstag, his latest work, has had a greater impact on a social and political level than previously. It is necessary in examining this work to refer to social and political art as well as the main issues of how and why he has provoked and involved so many people.

Marxist ideology demands that social and political art should articulate and define the problems inherent in today's society. The main aim for artists working in this mode is to try to increase people's awareness of events around them that can have any sort of impact on their life and environment. The work can range from dealing with cultural relations within today's society, sexual politics, nuclear power, America's military domination in Central America and Fascism. Some artists are viewed on an aesthetic level, others on a social one and the working methods vary considerably.

A major problem for artists whose work deals with socio-political concerns lies within the gallery system. Not only is their public restricted to an immediate art audience, but the people who buy their work often come from the very background the artists are criticising. Large multi-national corporations such

as Exxon and Saatchi and Saatchi are only two examples of the sort of high powered art patrons whose money supports the arts not only through love of art, but also as a means of tax avoidance and as a public relations exercise.

One of the most effective methods of communication in socio-political art is through media related methods such as straight forward documentation, posters, photography, pamphleteering and circulation through the mail using text, photography and video. Obviously when you use the publicity machine of the media one can reach a wider audience.

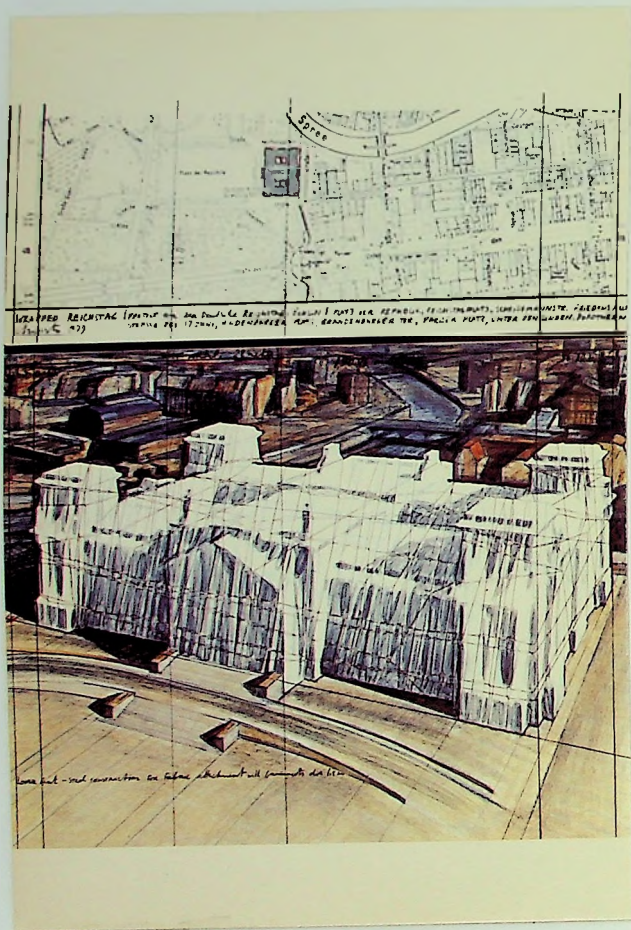
Because social and political art relies so much on impact, a utilization of the media is in many ways an ideal method of communication. Therefore, the scale of the gestures impact can be directly related to the extent of the artist's utilization of the media. This has nothing to do with the actual physical scale of the work because if a work is presented with enough emotive presence in the right context, its effectiveness is relative.

Sometimes it is not the work itself that contains the socio-political statement, but the way in which the work is constructed which gives it its body of meaning. The main point of interest in Christo in a socio-political context would lie within this last area. Christo is not what most Marxists would call a political artist, but he does make political art in the sense

that the main issues in his creative process involves the public arena. In other words the people who get involved in his projects no matter in what way, become part of the creative process in the work. This does not mean he is a man with a cause, neither is he a pacifist or a militant. He is simply an artist who tries to engage the public in a continual dialogue with his work.

Christo's present plans to wrap The Reichstag are the most politically motivated he has yet done. Though many of his previous projects such as the Running Fence, raised considerable controversy, the debates that have risen over his proposal to wrap The Reichstag have had a far greater political intensity an effect than previously where controversy was primarily caused by environmental and aesthetic issues.

The project's long fourteen year history is even longer when you take into consideration that he has always had a keen interest in the Berlin Wall and the conflicting ideologies between East and West. The Berlin Wall was built in 1961 and that summer Christo had his first one man show in Cologne which provided the foundation for his strong ties with the German cultural establishment. Christo at this time was still a stateless refugee without a passport or nationality, and the building of the wall was a frightening event. The following year in Paris on 27th June, 1962, he assembled his Iron Curtain-Wall of Oil Barrels in the Rue Visconti. The work was intended as both a commeration and a denunciation of the wall the previous year.



Wrapped Reichstag, Project for Berlin, 1979

This was not the only project Christo designed with the wall in mind prior to wrapping the Reichstag. One of his first ideas for the Running Fence was to have a running fence along the Western side of the Berlin Wall, but he abandoned this idea feeling that it did not really engage the East Germans on the other side. Then in 1971, Michael Cullen, an American living in Berlin, sent the Christos a postcard of The Reichstag suggesting that Christo wrap it. The idea immediately appealed to him because of his emotional involvement with the wall and his desire to do a project relating to it that would highlight the political situation that it signified in Berlin; also Cullen's proposal had come at the time of Valley Curtain and Christo was keen to do an urban project again.

The Reichstag itself stands in a peculiar political and physical vacuum between East and West; historically it has had an extremely turbulent history. To get an idea of the relevance the Reichstag has to the political situation in East and West Berlin, it is necessary to outline its historical background.

The building is a typical Victorian structure, designed by Wallot and completed in 1894. It was originally built to house the parliament that Bismarck established in 1871 as the representative body of a newly united German nation. From the beginning The Reichstag was part of a power struggle. The Kaiser resented the parliament as a challenge to his right to unlimited rule. In the end neither he nor Bismarck were

really interested in the building which was only used to house a democratic parliament during the Weimer Republic.

The Weimer Republic was followed by the arrival of the National Socialist party and Hitler. In 1933 the building was badly burned in a fire and the dome destroyed. This is thought to have been the work of Hitler who, however, gave the cause as a Bolshevik plot and used it as an excuse to sieze power. Towards the end of the second world war, The Reichstag was restored and once again stood as a home for the German parliament. Only a short time later during the 1945 battle of Berlin, the building was once more almost completely destroyed when the Soviets took it over. It was not until 1960, this time as a symbol of hope for a united Germany, that The Reichstag was once again rebuilt.

Today the main portion of the building lies in the British military sector, at the frontier between East and West. But 28 meters of the East facade is in the Soviet's air rights sector (2), and they have insisted that the building should not have any political use, but be used for cultural gatherings and non-official meetings. The West German government now convenes in Bonn. The building has remained under the juristdiction of the World War II allied forces - the US, the Soviet Union, France and Great Britian and of both the East and West German governments. The upkeep of the building is the responsibility of the West German government in Bonn. The person directly responsible for the Reichstag is the president of the Bundestag.

The West German president has final say over granting permission for Christo's proposal, but because The Reichstag is allocated in the British sector, the Germans are obliged to ask permission from the British who in turn ask the French and Americans, at the same time permission has to be sought from the Soviets. So for Christo to wrap The Reuichstag he has to get permission from not one, but five different governments and, because the idea has raided considerable controversy at the highest political and economic levels in Germany, the difficulties have been enormous.

"In 1981 I was ready to abandon The Reichstag project, but many people including the former chancellor, Willy Brandt, told me that dropping the project was not any more my decision, and that I should consider the many people who were helping make the project happen. It was very gratifying to see that even though I was fed up and depressed there were so many people with me and that there was a slim chance to get permission." (3)

As is usual in Christo's projects, the practical problems in wrapping the Reichstag are extremely complex, for not only is it a technically difficult task but, because of the political uneasiness surrounding the building, there have been difficulties in creating a working area.

"When we do an urban project, we need to create a working area. In this case it could have been on the side of the building, but not the East facade because it would require putting cranes on the Soviet territory, which is impossible. For the East facade we will be obliged to work from the roof" (4)

For this reason it has been decided to do all the work from the rooftop but, because it is a fragile area of glass and asphalt, a second protective roof has to be built on top of the first. At the same time wooden protective cages have to be built to protect the sculpture on the facade with attachment points for the fabric and ropes that will permit instalation and removal without altering the structure.

Aesthetically, Christo is interested in transforming the building into a more general and simplified shape. Through the materials he intends using which is of a heavier quality than that which he has previously used, he hopes to reduce the complicated facade to a simplier more sculptural form.

"The fabric for the Wrapped Reichstag will be a much thicker fabric, coated with PVC By coating the fabric it will be very much like the material I used for the project in Kassel, the 5,600 Cubic Meter Package making the folds much stiffer and angular, very much like a gothic sculpture - with more broken shapes, not rounded. The fabric will be extremely structural and less refined than in the Pont Neuf Wrapped. It will be in a silver grey metallic colour, like the frosted metal of automobiles, but not like aluminium ... the metallic coloured material will magnify the contrast between the highlights and shadows, in that way it will be very strong visually because the sky in Berlin is always cold blue or grey." (5)

"The shiney light coloured fabric will enlarge the size of the structure, it will be about 30% more voluminous, the folds of the fabric will take the force and the direction of the wind and will make the building strangely and constantly breathing. The daylight will be reflecting and changing all day, altering the surrounding perspective of the old buildings and the new structures around the Tiergarten". (6)

Goethe said that the value of an idea is proved by its power to organise the subject matter. Putting this into context with Christo's work is obvious, organisation plays a major role in his projects. I am not talking of the organisation of materials, but rather Christo's and Jeanne-Claude's ability to organise the people involved in the projects. This is at the crux of Christo's work. The bulk of his ideas, after the conception of the image, is the method - the hows and whys. In the end the process (wrapping) is more important than the product (wrapped), certainly the work without the emphasis placed on the process would seem empty because he has provided few purely artistic interpretations of his work. Indeed his originality lies partly in his constant diversion of the aesthetic debate. In a sense his monumental projects are intricate riddles working to engage a general public which would not usually encounter any artistic dialogue.

To gain any real momentum in The Wrapped Reichstag project, Christo has had to get deeply involved in internal German politics. Not only must he analyse and understand the complex situation within the German political power struggle, he must try to influence leaders in his favour - a difficult job, for their decisions will more than likely effect their political careers.

After the first refusal to wrap The Reichstag in 1977, Christo changed his tactics and decided that, instead of concentrating his persuasive powers on the German art establishment, he would instead focus attention on the German industrialists and

financiers, because of the enormous power and influence West Germany had on the Eastern Block. Hence in 1978 the Kuratorium for Christo's project Reichstag (Board for Christo's Reichstag project) was created. Made up of thirteen leading West German citizens from a range of fields - lawyers, businessmen, scientists, industrialists and bankers, the idea was to establish a broad base of support for the project among Germany's professional class which constitutes a major economic force in the country.

This was an important move by Christo, not only in terms of the assistance and the support they provide, but also because it effectively illustrates the need in today's society for art and business to offer each other mutual support. On the other hand of course, how can Christo justify wrapping The Reichstag if he goes to the very forces, i.e. big business who supported and benefited from the rise of Hitler in Germany? This may seem an irrelevant point to raise considering the time lapse between the two events, and the fact that the people on the committee are there, not to represent their businesses, but as influential individuals. But the fact still remains that the Second World War was the cause of the re-structuring of political power in Europe which indirectly caused the Cold War, resulting in the Berlin Wall. All this had played an important role in Christo's early years. It is in instances like that one that one sees Christo's aesthetic concerns overriding any political motives.

By early 1986 it began to look as though the project would actually be realised, in March of that same year a German business man formed the 'Berliner für den Reichstag' (Berliners for the Reichstag) whose objective was to collect ½ million signatures in support of the project.

Christo's determined battle to gain public support and recognition for his vast projects has always been successful because of his commitment to his ideas. The very fact that he has proposed to wrap The Reichstag, and people realise that he will do his utmost to succeed has captured their imagination to the extent that the ongoing public dialogue over the work has made it news as well as art. Apart from being known as a visual artist, Christo is also an artist in public relations. He has that innate sense of how to provoke public opinion into positive or negative responses that will either hit the headlines or be placed not far below them. So what will Christo achieve through this mammoth project? As is usual with these large scale projects he has committed himself to:

"Full cooperation with the community of Berlin, the various departments of the city and the Federal agencies of Bonn". (7)

He has also ensured paid employment for local residents when the time comes for the actual construction. But ultimately what Christo has said he hopes to achieve, outside of the usual involvement of the citizens of the city, is a greater awareness of The Reichstag itself not only in an aesthetic sense but also politically. Christo sees The Reichstag today as a symbol

of German history, and the issues he raises over the subject go beyond that of placing the building and its context in the public eye. In other words, to not only bring public attention to The Reichstag itself, but also to highlight the political situation it represents.

The act of wrapping does not completely destroy the identity of the object, but demands our further recognition of the forms which lie beneath it. It also, as with the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, acts as a focal point. By focusing one's attention on the building and allowing it to be viewed in a totally new way, the assumption is that people will also examine, not only its physical reality, but also the political context within which it is placed. One of Christo's main objectives with this project is to highlight the extraordinary situation in Berlin between East and West.

"(Berlin is) the only town where the two relations meet (East and West) and where the same ethnic type is living together, and seperately One side, on the West, Berlin is totally capitalist, urbanist, expansion. And the East Berlin is fantastically totalitarian, empty avenues and high buildings". (8)

For art to be a social force it must have a wide audience and have as its subject the social world. Marx constantly stressed that art has a human social reality and must be integrated in a world of meaning - it is not a seperate reality. But what is the reality of the Reichstag today? What is the reality of Christo wrapping it ?

Its status is an ambiguous one. Because of its turbulent history it has a relatively high profile, but it also represents something for the German nation East and West, that is no longer there. For the time being questions as to whether the building will ever revert back to its former function is a metaphysical one. It was built to house the Bundestag - the German government today sits in Bonn. It was built as a symbol of a united Germany - Germany is not united. Even the actual position of the building reflects this unreality, standing as it does in a wide open space isolated from its surroundings. This poignancy is perhaps the most important thing about the building today. It is there, but it is not. For though it stands as a house of parliament, today it is a conference centre with a restaurant and exhibition hall.

Christo, by wrapping the building is trying to push people's perception of it into a different reality. Normally when a building is wrapped it is for a practical purpose, Christo's act has none. Essentially it is a useless expensive gesture which freezes the building for two weeks, (even though it will function as per usual during the time it is wrapped). Presumably what Christo is aiming for is a physical skin which will reflect the building's uneasy role in political reality. By its very nature Christo's gesture could act as a pointer indicating the uselessness of the building, but one suspects that the debate will in the end be an aesthetic one subject to people's visual perception of the project.

If one of Christo's main objectives in wrapping the Reichstag is to create a dialogue with as many people as possible which would presumably lead to a greater awareness of the political situation surrounding the building, then he has only partially succeeded. One of the most fascinating things about the Reichstag is its physical situation crossing the border between East and West. However, any dialogue that Christo has contrived has been concentrated in the Western part of Berlin which means that only a portion of the city has been involved. On the other hand the political situation in East Berlin does not allow communication between the two halves of the city. Even so, if Christo does actually manage to pull the project off, and at this time it seems very likely, the whole point of the exercise is to create a more total awareness between East and West. If there is still a lack of dialogue between the two sections of Berlin, regardless of the political situation which enforces this, then there is little reason to believe that Christo's gesture will have any real impact. Perhaps it will allow for a more conscious awareness for a time of the situation, but art gestures are so often not taken seriously by the public even if they are as huge in scale as Christo's.

Physically, wrapping The Reichstag is a total reality. But in a social or political context that reality does not apply, especially because the Soviet's don't care about or take seriously, Christo as an artist. In an editorial in 'Pravada' - the official line was that the project was a decadent American stupidity, and that it would be better if they spent some of the money on the poor. (9)

At the same time a lot of Germans think there is no point to the project because the East Berliners, knowing nothing about contemporary art, would not be able to understand Christo's interpretation of the former parliamentary home of Germany. Christo argues that the East Berliners can get Western television. Through this medium they can keep in touch with what is happening in the art world, also they would be able to follow details of the project in the news.

Public access in Christo's art is achieved, not only through the use of local labour in the actual construction, but also through a constant dialogue with the authorities which is then projected through the media. In many ways Christo is probably one of the most accessible of modern artists working outside of the traditional format of painting and sculpture. Though this has a lot to do with the scale of his work, it has also a great deal to do with his utilisation of the media. It is hard to know whether Christo has courted the media or if the media courts Christo, whatever the case it has always acted as advertising for him. Because of the prominent profile of so many of the people whose support is needed, from relatively early on the news has been recording events surrounding the project. This has effectively kept it in the public eye helping to build up the support that Christo needs.

It is through this mode of access that Christo is able to realise his work. If for example, Christo was able to execute

his projects without any support from the media and suddenly there was Surrounded Islands, Running Fence or The Wrapped Reichstag, the reaction to the work would be very different. More than likely the work would be viewed with either indifference or hostility. A basic component of his working process which is public involvement would be lost. The unfamiliar is always difficult to deal with, and if a concept is in any way different it is often viewed with distrust. The more used one gets to something, the more it is accepted. So obviously the more Christo's projects are projected into the public eye, the more acceptance they get.

Ultimately, it is an extremely personal dialogue which Christo has with his public. In many ways it is a confusing one. Is his dialogue on an aesthetic level or a social one? If the dialogue is aesthetic then its effect is yet to be realised. If on the other hand it is social, the project has many flaws, for only the simplest of minds could believe that the Berliners are not very aware of the political situation and the physical vacuum within which they live. It is logical to assume at this point that Christo is only making a statement about The Reichstag and not trying to heighten people's awareness of it. Therefore the whole process that has gone into the realisation of the project is part of a creative and not a social act.

FOOTNOTES - CHAPTER IV

1. Hitler, who had never liked the building did not rush to have it rebuilt and while his architect drew up plans for a huge building in the totalitarian style, the Third Reich met in the Grant Opera House. Upon restoration The Reichstag was only used once when Goering, then president of the parliament, had the last meeting of the Third Reich there.
2. A few hundred yards away is the Brandenburg Gate and the buildings the Chancellory and the Ministry that once controlled Hitler's empire which are presently used by the Communist government.
3. Catologue: Christo, Wrapped Reichstag project for Berlin, p 25
4. ibid p. 31
5. ibid p. 32
6. Information on a handout on the Wrapped REichstag recieved from christo.
7. ibid
8. Alan Sonfist (Ed) - Art in the Land, a Critical Anthology of Environmental Art. p. 204
9. Catologue - Christo Wrapped Reichstag project for Berlin p. 29

CONCLUSION

When Christo takes a strong political stance in such projects as The Wrapped Reichstag, Project for Berlin, ultimately the work lacks any deep political impact. This is caused mainly through Christo's reluctance to commit the work to outsiders and at the same time his strong sense of the aesthetic. The more political works are in many ways the least successful primarily due to the peculiar lack of dialectic communication in them. It is when he works on a purely aesthetic level that the work is at its best because the reliance is on form and process and not on political issues.

The paradox between the aesthetic and the socio-political in his art is a difficult one because of the amount of public involvement in his work, but in the end the involvement of large amounts of people in Christo's art is a purely selfish gesture by him to promote his own creativity. When Christo plans a project any issue that rises from the work becomes part of it, this means that the people who are involved in whatever project is being realised becomes part of his overall creative act. It is not possible in this respect to separate Christo from his public. In the end his dialogue with them is about convincing them of his ideas.

While Christo has endeavoured to embrace as wide a range of people as possible in his work, it in no way resembles socialism. Even though the people directly involved in the work gain

financially in that he provides employment, his actual method of working is so much part of the Western world's business tradition that it conceals any socialist values that could be read into it.

Overall Christo is an artist whose achievements are of critical importance. He has been extremely successful in his attempt to break down the barriers between art and its audience in terms of financial benefits to an area as well as through the use of the public arena as a forum to discuss and criticise his art. At the same time the aesthetic impact of his work has an insistent grace that is unique. Through it he has achieved his enormous success in an immensely personal form of public communication while submitting before the public a monumental infringement of the accepted state of things, He does not tell the public what to do or criticise their culture - his dialogue is ultimately for his own benefit. What is most important is whether a project should or should not go ahead.

Christo's achievements are such that not only has he broadened the scope of modern art, but he has also managed to change it from being a presentation of values to a method of disclosure allowing the public to readily evaluate and recognise his creative process.

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