

TEXTS BY

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“the B.R.E.M.E.N files”

July 1, 1998.

Edition: 50

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the B.R.E.M.E.N files is issued on the occasion of the maritime project *communicating vessels* and is released on Staten Island, New York.

All texts originated within the framework of *Reederei SCHALKS (Übersetzungen)*, a maritime project that took place between January 1st and February 26th, 1994 in the gallery in the *KünstlerHaus am Deich* and on the *Kleine Weser*-River in Bremen, Germany. These texts first appeared on May 31, 1994 in the single issue of the *Weser Bootschaft / Weser Bootschap*, a newspaper for the Rhine-Weser region.

The shipowner's activities were financially supported by:

the Center for Visual Arts (CBK) Rotterdam, NL.
the Gallery in the KünstlerHaus, Bremen, D.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|------|
| <i>Arnold Schalks</i> CONCEPT | - 1 |
| <i>Arnold Schalks & Andre Dekker</i> THE WESER LETTERS | - 3 |
| <i>Horst Griese</i> PERMIT REQUEST | - 19 |
| <i>Andre Dekker</i> OPENING ADDRESS | - 21 |
| <i>Wim Konings</i> AN OARSMAN'S COMMENTARY | - 23 |
| <i>Ove Lucas</i> A PEDESTRIAN'S REPORT | - 24 |
| <i>Burkhard Strassmann</i> WHO SAYS A, MUST ALSO SAY B | - 28 |
| <i>Thomas Wolff</i> THE ART OF NAUTICAL ELOQUENCE | - 30 |

V Galerie im KünstlerHaus am Deich, Bremen: shipowner's office.



V Kleine Weser, Bremen: ferry service.



V Galerie im KünstlerHaus am Deich, Bremen: building site.



V 't Schalkje V in the dry dock.



CONCEPT/ *Arnold Schalks*

During my stay in Bremen, I want to concentrate on shipping and shipbuilding. For that reason, I will turn part of the KünstlerHaus gallery into my work place and use it as a shipyard. In this space, I want to build a wooden rowing-boat large enough to seat five people: one oarsman and four passengers. The vessel should measure approximately 17 feet long and 5 feet wide.

On February the 10th, the office of Reederei (shipowner) SCHALKS, located in another section of the gallery, will open to the public. On display will be photographs, drawings, model ships, and objects that relate to the building of ships, so-called nautical objects. The exhibition illustrates the fictitious history of the shipping company. The boat that is still under construction will be displayed in the Reederei SCHALKS shipyard section. As I figure it, building the vessel in Bremen will consume most of my time. I intend to prepare, make, or collect most of the nautical objects in Rotterdam and take them with me. To complete the collection, I shall spend a few days wandering around Bremen's harbour, looking for useful supplements (i.e. machine parts, wreckage, etc).

Ten days later, on February 20th, the boat will be taken out to the banks of the Kleine Weser River, where it shall be launched at high tide. My mother will christen the vessel. During the ceremony, the Rotterdam chorus 'KOOR & HANS' will sing sea shanties accompanied by saxophone. Oarsman Wim Konings will row the boat across the river and pick up Andre Dekker, who will be ferried back as the first passenger. After putting his feet on shore, Andre will deliver an opening address and declare the ferry open for service.

The boat will maintain a ferry service across the Kleine Weser between two stops: 1. Galerie im KünstlerHaus/Reederei SCHALKS and: 2. Neues Museum Weserburg. On both banks of the river landing places shall be marked with signposts displaying the ferry's timetable. The schedule is based on the tides of the Kleine Weser and will correspond with the opening hours of both museum and gallery. A small fee shall be asked for one's crossing. The passengers (wearing life-jackets) not only get ferried across, they also receive a unique ferry ticket. The tickets will be sold from a small ferry-house to be built at the foot of the embankment in front

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of the KünstlerHaus. The house is located near the point of passenger embarkation. The name of the shipping company, painted on the ferry-house reads: Reederei SCHALKS (*Übersetzungen*) [Shipowner SCHALKS (translations)].

Today I started written correspondence with Andre Dekker which we intend to continue throughout my stay in Bremen. My contribution will exist of authentic or fictive maritime memories, a report on shipyard activities, and thoughts jotted down during the building process. At the end of the working period, each text shall be examined for its relevance to the project. The correspondence will be edited and a selection of the texts will be translated into German. I will then publish a bilingual brochure in limited edition and distribute it to interested persons.

The decision to use shipping and shipbuilding as the starting-point for my project was inspired by Bremen's history and its naval tradition. The title of the project: Reederei SCHALKS reflects that tradition and asserts my relationship with it.

The form of the project: the exhibition and associated activities enable me to comment on that tradition. It permits me to show elements of that tradition in a different (=my) context (*Übersetzungen*).

The decision to build a boat and use it as a ferry has linguistic motives: With one's crossing of the Kleine Weser, I want to create a situation where the two meanings of the German word *übersetzen* (to ferry and to translate) overlap.

My decision to start a ferry service between the two sites mentioned has strategic as well as practical reasons; first of all, it establishes a mental and physical liaison between the museum and the gallery; secondly, it draws attention to the project; and lastly, it can be extremely cold in February..... the oarsman stays warm.

V The Park Lock viewed from atop the *Euromast*, Rotterdam.
from left to right: Wouter, Arnold and Marian Schalks



V "the Union of Water Tourists": Naval review on the *Brielse Lake*.



DIE KUNST DER REEDE / Thomas Wolff

(the art of nautical eloquence)

Arnold Schalks endeavours to set up a new Weser ferry service / Yesterday a daredevil launching.

De Weser steiht! (The Weser stands!) What during the *Eiswette* rarely happens: Now, of all days, the Weser froze over and is icebound. And thereby the challenging art project that the Rotterdam based artist Arnold Schalks has been preparing for weeks, almost capsized: a ferry service between *Neustadt* and the *Teerhof*-island, between Schalks' guest studio in the *KünstlerHaus am Deich* and the *Neues Museum Weserburg*. But the fact is, all the blinding snowstorms in the area couldn't stop yesterday's launching. Schalks sees himself as a translator in every imaginable sense of the word and, in that respect, he is quite stubborn.

As soon as he arrived in Bremen, Schalks built a complete shipyard as a way of lending tangible form to his more linguistic, philosophical work. No detail is missing: berths for the ferry, ticket booth, charted timetables. But it is the ferry vouchers that have special value. They do not only bear the names of the passenger and the vessel. The actual *Übersetzung*, translation is provided on

the backside: a word that Schalks translates with the aid of a dictionary from German into Dutch and, in case of a return ticket, back again. Whoever ventures to cross the Weser with the artist experiences simultaneously the obstinacy of language, how she rolls and rocks, and that words seldom come across the way one may think they should.

Schalks prefers to translate "Words that are rather tricky". In that case he doesn't have to look far. For example: the Dutch word *gevestigd* (settled) becomes *etabliert* (established) in German, which on its turn is converted into the Dutch word *solide* (solid) - that's how quick it goes. But clever word games are not Schalks' only interest. The ferry business with all its coincidence and adversity becomes a meaningful and clear metaphor for the ambiguity of words. Not only the characteristics of a culture are being stressed: Schalks' 'Übersetzungen' also demonstrate how close together different languages can be and how terse the meanings can sometimes brush pass each other.

from: *die Tageszeitung*, Bremen edition, Feb. 21,1994, Cultural Section, page 23.

WESER LETTERS / Arnold Schalks & Andre Dekker

Rotterdam, December 12, 1993

Dear Andre;

[...] Beyond the window, ocean giants continue putting into port. Gliding justly, too grand to lower themselves by reacting to the lashing wind. The mechanical pirouettes of their radar antennae attempt to hypnotize the surroundings. And I, I sit inside and build in the dry dock of this notebook, a dinghy and I name it: MS ITHINK. Tooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooot!

(The propelled ship)

Remarkable that the solid brass of the rotating propeller finds something to hang onto in such gentle water. Water that encircles with such precision. And that the immediate abutting water, again, takes a firm stand against the immediate abutting water that - upon each turn of duty - seeks support in the ever growing perimeter of its own elemental softness. The laborious relay ends only when the ripples, started by the propeller, reach the water that makes for the surf on the coastline of a faraway continent. Only then does the rotating propeller shaft's ratification take place and the ship's desired directional propulsion rests as fact.

Greetings from Arnold.



Rotterdam, December 13, 1993

Dear Andre;

[...] So far, by having put off my efficacious course to Bremen, the venture equates to a negative length of measurement or amounts at best to zero. The steps I have taken up till now must be seen as a running start before stepping foot on the actual track, penned 'Reederei SCHALKS', whose course I will enter on December the 23rd, and won't leave again until February the 26th.

In order to create the best possible working climate in Bremen, there are domestic affairs that must be taken care of before my departure. In the meanwhile, most of the track has been swept and cleared of any obstacles.

Many nights I lay awake. Is it from worry or excitement, impatience or doubt?

I try persistently to break into and access the collective family memory, where the experiences gained during the construction of two ships must be stored. Gropingly I search for indications that prove I am headed in the right direction. But so far my groping fingers have found nothing but my bedside light switch that, after having switched on, throws me back into the overexposed material world. Even repeating the ship names of the entire family fleet (*Schalkje I* through *IV*), as if forming a mantra, hasn't provided the desired result. But as every ship is specific, so is the necessary knowledge for building a specific ship: My grandfather built a wooden ship, therefore the shop floor of his memory is strewn with woodchips and shavings. My father built an iron ship. On the ground of his memory we will consequently come across iron filings and welding beads. Maybe the nature of memory is indeed holographic. In that case, I would do everything necessary to 'recollect' a woodshaving or welding bead in order to reconstruct the building of 'the ship'.

The time has arrived to choose a material for my forthcoming vessel. I will need to take into consideration my personal preferences and technical abilities. Metal is a possibility, but I have always harboured distrust for it. I dislike the use of violence as a primary tool in handling this material. Wood suits me better. I can 'read' wood. I can formulate in wood. Therefore, isn't wood favorable?

Yet, I would much rather build a boat out of another material. A material not practically suited for the building of a ship's hull and galley. A material with complete autonomous status. A material whose desire for consolidation in form doesn't last long or that will never ultimately conform to any process. This material is the uncrowned escape artist of the freezer: water.

I'm sure that my stay in Bremen will be too short to invent a boat out of water. Therefore, I am determined to engineer a wooden vessel. After all: wood is carried by water as opposed to metal, which sinks beneath it. [...]

Greetings from Arnold.



linguistic connotation (to translate) are irretrievably beyond redemption.

Two shores - two languages - two cultures - 'Who says A, must also say B' (shipowner Schalks' motto). Schalks offers his *Übersetzung* for service.

He translates a "maritime correspondence" he is having with fellow artist Andre Dekker. The ferry tickets will be distributed in German and Dutch and, if possible, Rotterdam's topclass oarsman Wim Konings will come and assist with the vessel's launching and the 'übersetzen'. "Übersetzen," says Schalks "is motion and incredibly communicative." In the meantime he is printing tickets, schedules and various signboards. He's designing

a company flag, he cares for wood and, oh yeah: a ferry house still has to be built.

Yes, Arnold Schalks shall become the director of an event. The man in the sailor's sweater with that brushed hair style of a seaman hides a little fear behind his infectious laugh: The concept tends to become stronger than the actual shipbuilding.

Oh God, a dock still has to come! Will there be a boat at all? Look there! As a precaution, the ferry already shrunk to a length of 8 feet 2 inches, instead of the originally planned 17 feet. Will it become a cockleshell? Whom shall we think of when we see or hear the name Schalks? Grandfather Harry, perhaps?

from: *die Tageszeitung*, Bremen edition, Jan. 6, 1994, Cultural Section, page 19.

WIE A ZEGT, MUß AUCH B SAGEN / Burkhard Straßmann

(Who says A , must also say B.)

New ferry service in Bremen! New ferry service in Bremen!
Mister Schalks is in town! With his own shipyard and shipping company!

On February 20th, in Bremen, to the sound of sea shanties, sung by a Rotterdam chorus, a new ferry service goes into business: the "Fährdienst Kleine Weser" (Kleine Weser ferry line) will then commence service between the KünstlerHaus am Deich and the Neues Museum Weserburg as scheduled. The mother of the Rotterdam based shipowner Arnold Schalks will then christen the ferry that was built in the Schalks shipyard with an until then kept secret name. The passengers will be given life-jackets and unique 'vouchers'.

News to think about. A bridge already stands on the indicated site. And who wants to go to the museum anyway? Or even to the KünstlerHaus? Why life-jackets?? What are unique 'vouchers'???

Actually, we deal with a daring project by a Dutch artist who lives in a guest studio in the KünstlerHaus for the time being. His concept is such that, up until the last moment, no one will know for certain whether or not the ferry will actually set sail across the Weser on February 20th.

What the artist does have to show

is a complete shipyard and a company office in the KünstlerHaus gallery. A dry dock, a collection of clamps, a circular saw and, moreover, maritime objects like fenders, lengths of rope, as well as a model of the motor yacht " 't Schalkje II".

Arnold Schalks Sr. had built boats and grandfather Harry established the Schalks shipping company's tradition by making up the name, 'shipowner Schalks' because it enabled him to buy goods at wholesale prices. For the time being 'shipowner Schalks' exists out of nothing more than a dented desk.

Schalks Jr. is an artist interested in linguistics and communication. In a small town in Spain, he bore a deep well and spoke with the Spanish people by means of the idiom of his archeological finds. He has also made an outstanding unconventional translation of Heidegger's "Unterwegs zur Sprache" ("On the Way to Language") consisting of objects that represent Heidegger's concepts (for that purpose he set up the travel agency *Heidegger Reisen*). And those who still don't understand that *übersetzen* (to ferry) also has a

Arnhem, December 17, 1993

Dear Arnold;

Through recollection of a woodshaving you would like to ascertain the construction of the ship that was under construction when this shaving fell to the floor of your grandfather's workplace. You propose that this woodshaving lies stored in the collective family memory. In an archive that you, in vain, try to gain access to. Lying in bed, you practice the religious technique of the hypnotic repetition of words until only a rhythm is left, in order that you become receptive to words dictated by far-away voices. Voices that drown out your own meaningless murmured words. But your invocation reaches no one.

Maybe the following hypotheses will be of use to you. Family memory exists only outside the family. It is not surprising that the search for knowledge in your family lineage, of which you form the end, is in vain. A family memory is called to life through people who have no family in the biological-social sense of the word: the loners, the bums, the outcasts, the priests, the orphans, the fools, the pig-headed and the hermits. Your family did not need a databank to store its histories or goals, like the building of a ship. This archive was not necessary because (hypothesis) your family made use of the flowing memory, while you (hypothesis) depend on the gleaned memory. Only this last form, the gleaned form, can be termed as the collective family memory. The flowing memory, that almost solely takes place within the family, works as follows: The parental experience established in word and knowledge is handed down through conversations or, more accurately said, in the form of love, instruction, order, and prohibition. An archive is redundant because the insights are handed down via a direct method. Through the transmission of spiritual matter, the material follows from one person to the other. One can compare it to casting iron. The liquid metal originating from the parents, provided with the personal characteristics and various qualities from their parents, and those of their parents, and their parents etc., is cast, and takes the moulds form: their offspring. And the latter, in their turn, will continue doing the same. Their maturation causes the warmth that is necessary to make the insights fluid. It enables these insights to siphon over into a new, solidified material. If this chain is broken through death or resistance by one of the parties, the individuals become dependent on the gleaning method or, so to speak, the collective family memory. Hereby, spiritual material is hoarded like a bushman collects his food.

Both depend on their knowledge of sources and deposits. They both have to develop techniques to discover unknown sources. The collective memory is, in fact, the instinct to 'find'. The memory consists of cross references and interpretation of existing information. Man calls this memory 'collective' because a collective is responsible for the upkeep of the system. Every person is obliged to pass on his/her limited knowledge. That is why ministers, jesters, idiots, and bums constantly jitter: some learn to memorize what they have heard because they are afraid they'll forget, others have 'interior dialogues' about the value of knowledge. A small category within this group works on the collective family memory by means of images and books. An indication for my presumption that you belong to the gleaners is found in your idea to search the harbours of Bremen and Rotterdam for maritime relics. Perhaps your family chain was once broken or the flowing method didn't properly succeed. Instinctively, you knew that gathering would lead to knowledge. Your sleepless nights, your efforts to come face to face with the source of your family's knowledge, your fantasies about The Holy Shaving are (hypothesis) after effects from the birth of the 'self'.

Tooooooooooooooooooot!

I see you vividly before my eyes, walking on the diving board. Within a few days you'll spring for a dive in the whirlpool called Germany. In eight days, once the board has stopped trembling, it will be my turn to jump.

[...]

Greetings from Andre.



Bremen, January 1, 1994

Dear Andre;

I went into the water. Not for the first time, not for the last. Little by little, I try to fathom the depths that are, without a doubt, beneath me. Even the tip of my toes have yet to reach bottom. Swimming is a well tested principle for staying afloat.

After arriving in Bremen, I quickly installed myself in the studio apartment on the top floor of the KünstlerHaus. Friendly treetops wave outside the windows. It is an appropriate space. Central heating makes the party complete.

Kleine Weser appears. Inevitably she is blond and on her, my *Narrenschiff*, I lay my thoughts. We danced around the *Behouden Huys*³, passed our desires to the skipper.

(1) *Das Narrenschiff* (The Ship of Fools, 1494): 114 chapters of written satire in verse by Sebastian Brant (1458 - 1521). An allegoric representation of the foolishness in the world in the form of a group of fools aboard a ship under way to places like *Montfiasco* and *Narragonia* (2). It contains late medieval fragments from didactic poems, classical satire, dance-macabre and carnival songs.

Willem Barentsz (1550 - 1597): Dutch seaman and explorer. He made two arctic expeditions with the intention of finding a northeastern trade route to China. In 1596, the second expedition discovered Bear Island and Spitsbergen. Proceeding with his journey, Barentsz set course for Nova Zembla. Locked in by ice, he was forced to stay the winter in a shack made from wreckage wood, which he named *Het Behouden Huys* (3) (The Safe and Sound Hut). He died during an attempt to reach Lapland in a shallop.

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nod, it is understood that one cannot stay here too long.) In this panopticum of modern art, time was brought to a standstill. Outside the skipper throws a rope to the man at the quay side. We stamp our feet around the House even if only to defy the winter. The chorus sings and the Mother pours out a bottle. On the other side of the river lies the heart of Bremen. Behind the museum, towers shoot into the sky. Unnoticed, people look up at Roland and hesitatingly ascend the steps of the Sankt Petri. It is far from here. At this place in time, other laws apply (the skipper strides down the steps, Charon appears reborn). On this shore glimmers that, which was once called Hope. (The Kleine behaves rather unruly when " 't Schalkje" is carried down the landing. Yonder, the first passenger impatiently awaits his embarkation as She solidifies between us. However, I asked myself many times which deliverance be preferred: the curving or the cleaving. Is it really more beautiful to die in the arms of a young woman than to be burned at the stake or be pierced by arrows?) Belief in the things we do surrounds me. Across the river, ensconced and exposed, the antlers are hung as punishment for a hunt out of control. The first embarks for his trip. He summons and cherishes the Kleine. Grumbling, he wades through her, assuming that this will get him a foot on shore (Hey fool, here is Narragonia ², but speak up man, speak...!). Cheers sound round the House, " 't Schalkje" is mooring, the long lath beats the ice incessantly. Hardly anything has happened, yet we are all moved. A tiny boat going from nowhere in particular to no place special, taking back one and the same. Over there I see a face behind a window, looking at me, astonished and wondering what this is all about. Others stand watching with him until two swans start heading their way out from under the bridge. (Maybe for the moment it is thinking of something that, from a particular point of view, shows resemblance to what is stored in his memory, beautiful and significant, and this in relation to the ridiculousness of what passes before his eyes. Perhaps, while looking at this riverside with those people round the house and that rowing-boat in the water, he is seized by the feeling that what is happening here is taking his imagination.) Later, after leaving the museum, he discovers the little house again between two houses, on the other side of the water. Closed and deserted." 't Schalkje" lifted out of the water.

Sunday, February 20th, 1994, in the train heading back towards Osnabrück. As a snow storm drifts by outside, I close my eyes and the

First of all, the infrastructure for the exhibition needed my attention. On the computer, I composed an invitation card, signposts, a ferry ticket, and the ferry's timetable. Afterwards, I kept myself busy mapping out my oeuvre. I collected data about time coordinates and properties of the work. I made a list of titles that I translated into German and set a picture archive of images pertaining to the work. You might call this bilingual threefold inventory: the working capitol of, or the buoyancy beneath the shipping company.

From my living quarters, the rippling of the Kleine Weser can be heard even through closed windows. I listen to it as if I am a radio amateur, expecting a sign of life at any moment from a yet unused wavelength. Besides the sounds of water toppling over the weir and the clumsy syncopated beat of the Erika typewriter, an absolute radio silence reigns here. It is good to sit in an empty space with a filled head. Room enough to store one's thoughts.

There comes a moment at which you realize that balance is not a given state of being but one that must be maintained. Walking on a gangplank is not the most convenient circumstance to discover this:

- My fall was accompanied by the eyewitnesses' jarring chord that, after I broke through the water's surface, *subito-piano* changed into an optical final chord, primarily of shades of green. As if green were a 'safe signal' for life to leave the body. Resistance was immediately broken. The friendship sealed. Peacefully rolling about in a complete foreign element, I hoped I could prolong my weightless stay. Breathing is of no importance in the case of breathless admiration. But all of a sudden my slow course of descent was interrupted. An accurately placed picker rudely raised me out of the water, placing me amongst the resonating voices flowing from figures that bended far over the side of the boat. -

What I remember from the experience is mainly the colour. Still today, I give myself willingly to that green glimmer like on a casual summer's day in a densely foliated wood. Better yet, I like finding myself in the tubes of a water level, enjoying the incoming diffuse and bright green light.

- After we had crawled into the bow ¹ and lay in our sleeping bags, the inevitable moment would come when my parents started arranging their

sleeping quarters for the night. The back cushions from the cabin couch, layed out flat on the folded-down collapsible table, were used as a mattress. These actions caused the ship to sway slightly. I would then, as a form of ‘first-aid’ to falling asleep, imagine myself being a waterlevel in which the air bubble would sometimes find itself in my crown, sometimes in the tip of my big toe.

(1) The bow of the ship in which we bunked.

My night’s rest is healthy again. From my bedroom’s sky window I look out at a giant crane that, from the beginning of my stay until now, has remained unmanned because of Christmas vacation. Yet, to my surprise, I find the monster in another position every morning. Initially, I thought I had been mistaken. The change in position being so minimal, I could blame it on an optical illusion. Until today. The swing round this morning was impossible to overlook. In the meanwhile, I have learned that there must be a command apparatus, stored somewhere in the crane’s inner most interior, that watches the direction of the wind and takes care that its stern is rounded up in the wind; all a crane of such size needs to remain in an upright position. I greet him in my thoughts as I see him appear like a gigantic weathervane above the skyline of the Weser’s left bank.

I let the festivities and, so I heard, the local riots pass by without noticing. My new year began the moment I settled into this space. It was then the world temporarily became my concept and my concept temporarily the world. As I reread my concept, I feel like a magician: “and out of this hat, I pull.....”. [...]

Greetings from Arnold.



Bremen, January 9, 1994

Dear Andre;

In my concept I announced that I would spend a few days wandering around different areas of Bremen’s harbour. That idea still hasn’t come to much. My wanderings are limited to the stationary and sports departments of Karstadt and Horten Stores. Many times, I voluntarily submerged into the basement of Dörrbecker’s stationary and bookstore to

This morning the bells of the Sankt-Petri cathedral conducted the entire ensemble of city chimes, spreading its peal like a warm blanket over Bremen. After a long walk through the wintery city, I arrived at the Kunsthalle at exactly 10 a.m. It made me feel sad. Once, it had been stately and grand, now, it was decrepit and visibly weighed down by the lack of money to simply keep the building in good shape. On the other hand, it does have a new wing, built with respect for the original architecture, but how it languished. Stuffed rooms, obediently arranged in period and style, so devoid of spirit. Woe betide the one who must walk back and forth the whole damn day so that no one dare touch anything. Surely, like everywhere else in the world, the well-known and famous found a place under this roof. In the room with seventeenth century Dutch painting, a work hung in, what is called, a place of honour. It looks like a... Is this really a...? It appears to be (merely?) a portrait, painted by someone in.... ‘s circle... no, not even an attribution... Nevertheless, still, it could have been, at first glance, from a distance, indeed, a Rembrandt. An hour and a half later, as I left the orphaned behind and went looking for the Kleine, the bells rang again. (Inadvertently, I have to think back to the train ride here. Not too far from Hengelo, a young woman sat across from me. A large round face, almost blushing, blond and full figured, all over, up and down, loose and perfectly natural. Small wonder, women like that live there and nowhere else. Not in Rotterdam. And that’s the way it should be. To quench these desires you leave the train in places like Vroomshoop or Oldenzaal.) Last night, on a scouting expedition, I walked near and around here as well. Everything dark and silent, nothing hinting at the day to come, although the small house must have been in its place by then. This time, I spotted it instantly from the bridge, indeed, as if it had stood there all the time.

Again I look through a window, this time I stand a few stories higher in that immaculate Neues Museum. Below, I see people on the river bank, less numerous now, having fled the cold. With increasing difficulty “ ‘t Schalkje” rocks to and fro through the ice. He, who crosses over the slippery boulders, rising up from the water, goes ahead with his long stick. This must wellnigh be Sisyphus. Behind me, our heros from the last decade lie in state. There is only one other individual paying homage to them, the Guard is on our heels. (Crawl-through-thread-one’s-way-through on the top floor. A darkened space in which Boltanski’s *memento mori*. Just as I am about to leave the room, he opens the door. A devoted

A PEDESTRIAN's REPORT / *Ove Lucas*

Bremen, February 20, 1994

From here, inside the Neues Museum Weserburg, in rooms flaunting the scent of fresh paint, the scene below looks rather absurd. Outside, along the banks of the Kleine Weser -a tributary branch of the Weser River in the center of Bremen- across the water stands a little wooden house. Shivering people stand around it, keeping themselves warm with *Glühwein* and the excitement of continuous goings-on. In the water or, better said, through sheets of ice wherein lanes are scarce, a rowing-boat moves with two people aboard. Their orange life-jackets make for a sharp contrast. Someone walks alongside of them. With great difficulty he chips at the ice with a long stick, breaking a path through it, in order that the small boat can quest ahead. The sky is grey, the temperature is below zero and it snows. It is strange to stand here, looking through a window inside a heated museum. Only moments ago I stood there, on the far bank, by that little house and played my part in what must have been a peculiar gathering to an outsider. Museum guards come and stand beside me and marvel at the two in the rowing-boat. And of course it was odd to see a little boat with two people in flashy orange life-jackets in the midst of such cold, trying to make their way through the ice floes. When swans appeared from under the right side of the bridge, where the water was still open, the guard's attention was diverted.

Over there, on the other side of the Kleine Weser, Reederei/Fähre Schalks had been established. An almost forgotten and useless waterfront, at best good for a short walk. Houses, separated from the water by a road and footpath. On this side: an island that parts the Kleine from the Weser. Reederei/Fähre Schalks: a small wooden house where *Glühwein* and ferry tickets are being sold, and a rowing-boat "t Schalkje V", whereby two passengers will be ferried from one bank to the other (Übersetzung) and possibly, back again. From here it looks like a journey from no place special to nowhere in particular and vice versa. Just moments ago, the enterprise pushed off in a festive mood. The chorus sang sea shanties, his mother christened "t Schalkje" and the first passenger went aboard. Bremen, Sunday February 20th, 1994, noontime, wet snow falls steadily from out of a deep grey cloud cover. *Das Narrenschiff fährt los*¹ (The Ship of Fools pushes off).

emerge with a filled bag and a full notebook (have you ever heard of a *Bleistift-verlängerer* (a pencil extender) or a *Heftschoner* (a notebook guard)? Wonderful!)

- The major part of the journey to the town of Brielle was behind us: via the Vliet and the Schie waterways, the convoy of the "Union of Water Tourists" had reached Rotterdam. The fleet's forward line took its place in the Park Lock and waited to be taken through.

The first ship to leave the lock belonged to chairman Pons. He sailed out in front of the "Union" members as they merged into the Nieuwe Maas River. There was a distance of approximately 3.78 nautical miles (= 4 1/2 miles) to cover. We had to cross the wild waters of the Nieuwe Maas before we could port and reach the calmer water of the Brielse Maas. At the end of the Müller Pier, we turned the helm to starboard. The great crossing could begin.

With our life-jackets on, we took our places on the quarter deck. This enabled us to leave the ship unhindered, should it eventually capsize.

On board the ship ahead of us, Mr. Pons stood tall behind the steering wheel. His back radiated confidence. It was possible to steer our boat at right angles to the waves. By doing so, the effect from the washes would only be felt by the sturdy claps of the hull hitting the water's surface. There was hardly any traffic in the surrounding areas. Off in the distance, a few vessels of larger tonnage were coming towards us.

(The laws of geometric optics can also be applied to the movement of the waves. Suppose a wave line behaves like a ray of light. In that case, the banks of the river Maas can be compared with the planes of a prism that reflect the entering light in equivalent angles.)

The quarter deck, fifteen minutes later: During the pandemonium we found ourselves in, it appeared that choosing the ideal angle amid the on-rolling waves was no longer an option. In the somersaulting vessel, we ground our teeth.

Elsewhere in the cabin: The rubber band that bound the cabinet door handles for extra security, had given way. With the weight of the full dinner service piled against the inside of the cabinet doors; they burst open! The kinetic energy of the heavy swell was immediately transformed into a boisterous multiple ricochet of cups and saucers, plates, pans, and butter dish. - [...]

Greetings from Arnold.



Düsseldorf, January 10, 1994

Dear Arnold;

Strange, now that I reflect on how to begin this letter, memories come back to mind. I could begin with a question, but the urge to write you 1 or 2 sentences that relate to your commission is overbearing. First of all, the words of the filmmaker/ practical joker Achternbusch entered my mind which, of course, is a silly expression, because my mind already knows these words, and because my mind is within me, these words can not enter. Or, one must understand that "entered my mind" reads as "my mind entered me", but okay.

He must have said: "*Schau, die Wahrheit ist ein Floß. Damit setzt man über. Dann läßt man sie zurück. Das ist unsere Situation.*" ("Look, Truth is a raft. With that, one is ferried across. Then, one leaves it behind. That is our situation.") Now you and then him again. Truth is a raft. I get it! An out of control platform, but it keeps your feet dry and takes you someplace as well. Just spring aboard and you will ultimately end up in the ocean's tides. Death, in that case, is indeed uncertain (perhaps a seasoned alcoholic takes longer to die but has more certitude), yet the chance of being charitably received by a community of fifty fishermen and hunters in Lapland is also quite unlikely. The following sentence produces an interpretation problem: with that, with the raft, one is ferried across. The person who mans the raft has a stick, otherwise he would never make it to the other side. But what gets ferried across? An object, another person, the self? Is it the main character himself that is being transported to the other side by means of truth? If so the sentence should read: "With that, you cross to the other side". And if this is a metaphor, then the 'water' and the 'other side' are elements as well, and we have to find out what they symbolize. Is the water the Evil or the Lie? Or is the water an obstacle that can only be overcome by truth? And why must we cross to the other side? What do we achieve when we cross with a raft called 'Truth'? Is the other side something else than the land of truth? Why do we want to go there if the land holds no truth? Why is there only Truth when water-borne? On to the next sentence, in the hope that it gives us the key. "Then one leaves it behind." Is this cynicism? If we have achieved our goal by means of truth, we don't need truth anymore! For safety's sake, I would carry the raft on my back or build a little cart for it. Or is there a raft in every river? Why isn't there some kind of

AN OARSMAN's COMMENTARY / *Wim Konings (skiffer)*

I arrived in Bremen on Saturday evening, February the 19th. The next morning I would row the 't Schalkje V' across the Kleine Weser. I had trained a lot the last few months and was in good condition. A thin sheet of ice lay on the surface of the water.

Sunday morning: test trial. Actually, I was against the idea. It was bitter cold, the ice had grown thicker overnight and I thought it would be impossible to get through. Furthermore, during my first inspection of the boat, I had noticed several construction errors:

The iron oarlocks were too wide for the cuffs, which resulted in ill-fixed oars while rowing. The book case and passenger's seat were at the stern, while the rower's seat had been constructed somewhat beyond the middle of the boat, more towards the bow. That is asking for balance problems. Moreover, the footboard that normally functions as a push-off point, was missing. This way there would be no possibility to really build up power. What had I trained for if I could not make use of my strengths properly?

The artist and his retinue, however, showed no sign that the project might be cancelled. Everything and everyone seemed captured by a 'holy obligation' that could only have been prompted through ignorance of the elements. None the less, I was dead set against it. This had to end in a scene such as in the painting "Sea of Ice" (1824) by Caspar David Friedrich, better known by the title of the lost painting "*Die gescheiterte »Hoffnung«*" by the same master which I was to behold two days later in the Hamburger Kunsthalle. It represents a monument made of ice floes. In the distance, between floes, only a small piece from a stern of a doomed ship is visible. There was no longer a real way back. To make matters worse, the best helmsmen stood on shore. Here, only courage born out of desperation could bring about salvation.

On the day of the opening, after hours of ridiculous attempts to break the ice, being chilled to the bone and blue in the face, a first 'translation' succeeded under loud cheering from the bystanders. My first passenger was Andre Dekker who was going to deliver the opening speech. During the crossing, he jabbered the song "Ketelbinkie" ("Tin kettle boy") through a megaphone pointed straight in my face. It seemed as if he wanted to suggest that our journey had been effortless and had sailed by unnoticed. It appeared to have eluded everyone that the means of 'translation': the language and the vessel, did not hold water.

overcome. She said: 'This flood of thoughts leaves me speechless.' Upon our stepping out of the boat she came to her senses again. She whispered that she will support the ferry company and its customers with her buoyancy and fluency. She wishes all of you a safe and sound journey!

*Wittefietsenplan** for Truth on dry land? Why are we only able to make use of the Truth when there is an obstacle ahead? Why is Truth a raft? I can only accept this when it is uncertain whether the raft is rotten or sound. Because, after all, has this vehicle ever guaranteed reaching one's goal? Or does the 'other side' mean: the Other Side? [...] What's up with metaphors like this that sound so convincing, they make the headlines?

Düsseldorf! Boat town! Sail '94 again! There is no brochure that hasn't mentioned it! Hannover: commerce and above all, technology; München: Achternbusch and above all, beer; but Düsseldorf: art, and above all "Boat"! This time I must go there and this is why: through my fear of water I do not understand much of the world that, after all, consists of no less than seventy percent of this substance. I remember the impact that pictures of boatshows had on me at a time when I knew very little about the world outside. A hall full of boats: how were people able to view these boats? Had they flooded the hall? Had they needed to build a pier? I deduced: boats lie in the water; these boats lie in a hall, therefore, there must be water in the hall. But I had never seen such a hall. What I did see, didn't make sense. Hundreds of boats with hoisted sails, close to each other in a huge hall. The crucial questions were: how had they gotten the boats inside and why had they done it? At the age of eleven, I was ignorant of commerce and transportation, but above all, I knew nothing about aquatic sports. Because it related to something watery, I hadn't gotten the gist of it. That is why I had not been able to solve the logistical problems at that time. The phenomenon "Boat" did not interest me. At any rate, not these boats with their repulsive strange big white pieces of cloth. I had never seen these boats sail and I didn't know what fun it was to slice through the water with razor-edged fiberglass. For me, a boat was a black tarred iron barge that could deliver or pick something up with the help of a long pole. I didn't understand these sails. Fifteen years ago, when I was first in Düsseldorf, I was shocked by all the "Boat" propaganda. I didn't know how to answer the question I had asked myself as a child. I was perplexed by the obvious importance of the "Boot-Messe". (I knew that 'Messe' means convention or trade fair, but

* *Wittefietsenplan* = A plan in Amsterdam in the late sixties, early seventies where unlocked white bicycles were left around the city for everyone to use. There was no guarantee that the bike you had rode to a certain destination would still be in the same place when you'd return for it. If not, you would have to find another white bike or come up with an alternative plan to get where you wanted to go.

what it implied, I did not know. When did you first comprehend the meaning of the word fair?) The posters were horrible, which is common for events where enormous crowds of people come together to enjoy themselves. Not me. Now I understand that my aversion to water was so strong that the mere shape of a sailing boat and above all, the disgusting optimistic blue and white made me shudder. Consequently, I still couldn't answer the questions that were evoked by a photograph ten years before, at a time when my fear for water hadn't settled forever in my nervous system. And I still can't answer them. I'm going to Boat.

Arnold, by the way, a third memory just sprung up that connects the previous two. In the year I didn't understand the photo, I sailed with a raft across a pond. Nelly van Gerven was my passenger. I, the ferryman of Truth, set out with her for the other side. Right before the water's edge, just before Truth landed and I could be relieved that -thanks to Truth's stability- the unkept promise to my mother never to sail a raft again had no effect, the boat slightly tilted and Nelly panicked. She tried to restore balance by moving towards the other end. As a consequence, we slid screaming and gropingly over the side, into the water. Fear made her cry and fear made me angry. She promised she wouldn't tell and went home. That afternoon I went to a small shipyard, knowing that no one ever goes there. I washed my clothes in the clean water of the *Haantje* and waited until they were dry. When I arrived home, I hadn't the chance to even start to lie. Nelly had betrayed me. She had scuttled my raft called Truth. The truth that I could fully manage the raft, and that my mother's fears were groundless, were swept overboard. Never again would my Truth sail. My fear for water was definite. [...]

Greetings from Andre.



OPENING ADDRESS / *Andre Dekker*

Held on February 20, 1994

It is my pleasure to announce that Madam Weser agrees with cutting through her water's surface between the museum and gallery. With a pair of waves, tenderly washing alongside, she said: 'I am very delighted to speak with someone after so many years.' She told me that, since the invention of steam and motor-driven ships, she had rather kept silent. In the old days she had enjoyed talking with people on the water. But nowadays, a pleasant conversation is downright impossible because of all the noise. Actually, she hates the language that powered ships force her to speak. She mumbles a bit to herself and no one listens. She, herself, has grown a bit deaf and from lack of practice, she's no longer at home with our language. When I told her that this boat was simultaneously equipped to carry linguistic elements across, to translate, she was very enthusiastic. You all saw the boat undulate. Without hesitation, she offered her archaic linguistic knowledge to this ferry service between the Dutch and the German languages. She can still remember a time when the differences between the two languages were even less than they are now. With pleasure, she remembers the time when people laid on the foredeck and spoke with her. (She speaks not only with the rippling of her waves. The crashing of the oars, the purling against the boat flanks and the lisp at the stem and stern enable her to give expression to the most divergent set of phrases.) In those days the conversations were not yet disturbed by engine noises and frequently touched upon the subtle things in life: At the stern she told of the many poems dedicated to her and with melancholic undulation she remembered the day Venus was born. Along the bow she had become a bit more cheerful when the conversation turned to the fishermen who had always been thankful of her. In a fitting way, the bow's rendition of various noises made one think of wailing washerwomen and children playing. Sometimes the straining oars splattered, reminding her of submarines, a topic which aroused white caps of anger. She firmly denies these troublemakers access to the depths within her. As she became somewhat calmer and while Wim Konings rowed the ferry towards the bank in superior style, I had the opportunity to talk with her about the concept behind Reederei SCHALKS on the quiet side of the boat. We docked. Madam Weser fell silent. She was noticeably quite

have chosen this time of year for his performance. Passenger safety will be taken care of by obligating each participant to wear a life-jacket. This above stated requirement satisfied the officers of the harbor police during their 2/20 inspection.

During strong ice floes, the art ferry will not sail.

We regret that we are only now submitting our request for a permit. We assumed we would be allowed to sail the Kleine Weser without much ado, just as sport associations, fishermen, etc. do.

Taking into account the short notice and in order to make possible the artist's intended conclusion to his elaborate performance project, we kindly request an unconventionally rapid approval. We offer our apologies that our request has come so late.

For additional information please contact:
Horst Griese, KünstlerHaus, Tel. 508598, Fax 508305.

Sincerely yours,
Horst Griese.

Düsseldorf, January 18, 1994

[...] Dear "Boat Düsseldorf", congratulations with your twenty-fifth anniversary, break a leg. [...]

Greetings from Andre.



Bremen, January 20, 1994

Dear Andre;

Monday, January 10, 1994 3pm:

To start with, I spoke to my muscles: "Dear biceps, triceps, left and right." In the dry dock I placed the bowboard, transom, and the center mould at carefully measured distances from each other. In that way, I determined the profile of the future vessel.

Next, the pine lath for the keel needed to be bent into shape. I stuffed one end of the lath under the edge of my steel desk. I weighed the other end down with as much weight as the wood could bear. I supported the curve's starting point with an adjustable stay. Before beginning the shaping process, I had to weigh the desk down considerably because, through the leverage, the desk would occasionally go for a walk.

- Nervously, I stood with a cellophane wrapped cigar on the starboard side of the ship. Over and again, I checked and gauged the position of the drawbridge keeper, who routinely leaned out the window of his toll house with a fishing pole. A wooden shoe was visible at the end of a still taut fishing line. I fixed my eyes on that object. And then the wooden shoe swayed away. I fluttered my arms wildly about myself. Through the uncoordinated movements, the line wrapped itself around my arm. I didn't have much time to get my arm free and in the haste of the moment, the cigar landed in the water next to the wooden shoe. This action didn't cause the feared immediate downward clap of the bridgedeck but only the hardly discernible shrugging of a civil servant's shoulder. -

The lath is bent by heating it from underneath while keeping the topside wet. Through continual playing with the weight and shifting the stay, it is possible to get exactly the right curve. That day, I managed to bend the keel lath and two others in such a way that they fit the moulds perfectly.

Joining the thin plywood (the sheeting that will later separate wet from dry) was child's play in comparison. By Friday afternoon I had, even for the layman, a recognizable boat. I spent Saturday reinforcing the hull and adding provisions essential for the specific task of this boat: I constructed a bookcase underneath the passenger's seat. There, my dictionaries will be placed during the 'translation'. If the oarsman turns round in his seat, he will find himself sitting behind a removable desk with a typewriter and other objects needed to fill out the ferry tickets for the journey. I made a bottom board to prevent embarking passengers from immediately breaking through the floor of the ferry boat. For the ultimate proof that we are dealing with a rowing-boat, I screwed the oarlocks to the gunwale!

-The starting shot sounded. It was difficult for my sneakers to grip the lacquered smooth bottom of the dinghy. At first, it appeared as if my opponent and I paced equally through the white caps. The oarlocks squeaked and creaked under the force of our strokes. Loud encouragement came from the pier from which we sailed. It was not clear to us who the cheers were meant for. We held as tight a course as we possibly could in the direction of the buoy to be rounded. I reached the turning point first and deluded myself with certainly winning the cup.

While turning the boat round the buoy, the right oar shot out of its oarlock and landed in the water. Slowly, it drifted away from me. Through my attempts to capture the deserter, the left oar fell along the other side of the boat. Alarmed, I tore my t-shirt off. With it, I hoped to increase my arm's extension, but my lashing at the water with the garment only enlarged the distance between the desired object and myself. In the distance, I heard vociferous cheering for my rival, leisurely putting into port. Before me, I watched my white t-shirt solemnly sink away into the green grey water of Kager Lake. -

From now on, long before the sun rises every morning, the crane driver will lift me from my bed. Sometimes the light from the halogen lamp, mounted in the armpit of the revolving crane, penetrates my bedroom. At such a moment, I roll over. (The crane has lost somewhat of its authority since I comprehend that another crane has been necessary for this one to occupy its present high position.)

PERMIT REQUEST / Horst Griese

Wasser- und Schiffsamt, Bremen
Fax 5378400

Feb. 21, 1994

Re: Permit request for an art performance on the Kleine Weser.

The performance is to take place on the following days and during the times listed:

| | |
|------|------------------------|
| 1-22 | 11:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. |
| 2-23 | 12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. |
| 2-24 | 12:00 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. |
| 2-25 | 1:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m. |
| 2-26 | 2:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m. |

In the Weser Courier from 2/21, it was announced that the performance on the Kleine Weser River would last for two months. This is incorrect.

Please find a detailed description of the project in the attached concept written by the Rotterdam artist Arnold Schalks.

In this context, the following is of importance: **We are not dealing with a commercial activity nor with an actual ferry company.**

Creating an 'authentic' impression is part of the artist's strategy. In order to best realize the work, the artist chose to take on the roll of an operative firm. The article in the Weser Kurier from 2/21 gave cause to the misunderstanding that a substantial fee would be demanded. This impression is useful because it might contribute to the suggestion that we deal with an actual firm.

In fact, the following is going to happen:

The artist sells small art works that resemble ferry tickets, vouchers he designs individually and upon which a typewritten translation is provided. The works cost 10 or 15 DM (\$5 or \$7.50). Independent of the buying and/or selling of these "ferry vouchers", the artist brings any ferry fan, at their own risk and **free of charge**, across the Kleine Weser. All things considered, this is not a yielding service but a performance, an artistic event. Had the artist pursued a commercial goal he would never

wherein I fit these thoughts. I believe I can take it easy, even though it's uncertain what awaits me under their surfaces.

Greetings from Arnold.

Thoughts after waking:

The ship needs to be content with the cargo it carries in its hold.

A person needs to take pleasure in the body in which he/she moves his/her identity through space.

The brain needs to make the best of the thoughts that arise within its limitations.

The word is in the position to free itself from the meaning, with which it had been expressed, at any desired moment.

I have never before been so strongly guided through the creative process by my intuition as in this project. Initially, I feared being pushed unprepared into the circus ring to perform a juggling act. Now it appears that my manager booked me as a tightrope acrobat. During rehearsals, all indications are that the provider has hung an invisible safety net under the high and tight steel cable I reluctantly cross. Such a provision supports one's self-confidence. (One must only resist the temptation to try the net, and perhaps be smashed to smithereens.)

While Australia continues smouldering and Los Angeles experiences after-shocks; while Limburg remains soggy and Washington freezes to death, I practice the art of balance on the ridge of my imagination while holding my breath! My feet automatically find the perfect position to walk the high wire above the hypothetical circus ring. Slowly, the actions scheduled for next Sunday, February 20th, begin to come about, taking a natural order, form and sense.

- "The bridge is not operated on Sundays." The missed chance of an additional sign of the cross, created by the successive squared movements of ship and automobile, was obviously taken for granted by this pious community. For the skipper it meant: killing time with the view of quay walls and dolphin. After taking measurements of our ship with collapsed windows, lowered mast, removed "Union"-flag, and the intake of extra water, it appeared as if a passage would be possible. With one person lying on the foredeck and one person squatted on the quarterdeck, we brought the ship into position before the underpass. Using the crossbeams from the bridge deck as a hold, we slowly pulled the vessel under the bridge. In the peculiar acoustics that only exist in the space under a bridge, we piloted it to the other side. After our narrow passage, as I straightened up again, the top of my head was hit by an insipid gob of phlegm from above.-

Today I took the bicycle and followed the Weser upstream. The bicycle path meanders across a dike. In this landscape, you can scarcely find a trace of the city you just left. The next possibility to cross the river is by the grand Weser Weir. The uproar of the invisible whirlpool down below forces the cyclist to cast a glance out-over the railing of the dam. With tremendous speed but at even keel, the mass of water rushes on. The dam's columns comb a part in the water. The eddies between the columns perform a deafening but virtuoso improvisation to a hydrostatic theme. Despite the enormous amount of water that passes through (in the future, the city wants to drive turbines with its power) the water surface takes an almost solid, plastic shape, like casting resin. It is as if the column of air I look down at is the solid matrix that forces the rushing, otherwise so amorphous water into shape. The same performance is repeated between the adjacent and following columns.

The boat is ready: the bollards are fixed, the mooring cable is twined, the hull is coated in high gloss lacquer, and the oars are bought. One of these days, Horst and I will test this vessel that will have to remain anonymous until its christening. In order to keep the press-mosquitoes at arm's length, the time and location of the trial cruise are being kept secret until further notice. What I can give away is that it will take place near the water at high tide.

Greetings and lots of 'Boat', Arnold



Bremen, February 1, 1994

Dear Andre;
 Every phase of entering water is followed by that of discharging water. The waning moon relieves the waxing one. After one month of being flooded by the German language and after having quenched my thirst for it, I have come to the conclusion that my Dutch has been driven back beyond the point where the subconscious empties into the conscious. I come up with striking German headings only to discover that, to my surprise, the way back to a proper Dutch equivalent has slipped from memory. Something like that just happened outside. The salty water from the German Bay, helped by a northwesterly gale, has pushed the fresh water from the Weser far back beyond her

mouth. The water level reached heights never met before in living memory. It almost appeared as if the name of a piece currently being exhibited in the Weserburg Museum: Richard Long's "driftwood circle", had been a prophecy instead of a title. The water of the Weser tumbles backwards instead of spilling forward over the edge of the dam. For a moment, a glimpse into the past is granted to us.

- He unfolded his stool and set it at the tip of the island. But before he could take his place, a sequence of events had to be carried out. The distance between us was too great to determine whether or not there was anything being said during the ritual. Subsequently, he took his place. On his right: the attentive dog and in the grass on his left: the scoop net. Concentration. Bait on the hook. Cast out. Draw in. The reel rattled. "Cuckoo...." (in the woods).

As I approached him and the dog, my grandfather rose from his stool. While straightening himself he checked the position of the scoop net by feeling his way. Behind his back, he gestured to keep me at bay. Slowly, he began to draw the line in. His gaze and that of the dog were one, fixed on the point where the line cut into the water's surface. [...] The body was too large to fit the scoop net. With the swish of its tail it tried to free itself from its straitjacket. The dog, delighted by the sight of so much beauty, slightly changed position.

Hack!: snapping, the fish-head landed in the grass.

Slash!: the knife slit lengthwise through the silvery body of the fish. As if it turned on hinges, the body swung open. In a very small but tidy room in the midst of intestinal disorder, the heart of the fish bounced on, determined to continue life with or without a head. I was impressed by the sight of such deep confidence in what was clearly a lost cause. Grandfather pointed at the still tremendously frightful snapping snout in the grass. "Peer," he said, "a pike is a predatory fish, tough and almost indestructible." The fish meat thrown to the dog was snatched from the air with familiar gratitude.

From that moment on, I could never again look at the lake's surface without suspicion.-

The water level is normal. The current has resumed its direction and the meadows that only a few days ago were flooded have been revealed. Reclaimed paths join up with the passable road system. I believe that it is time for reflection. I look back at the collection of thoughts that sprung into my mind during this period. I assess the forms



B.R.E.M.E.N
the files