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‘Object into Action and Action into Object’:

Joseph Beuys and the Political Work of Social Sculpture

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy
in Art History

by

Andrea Dana Gyorody

2017

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2017

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

‘Object into Action and Action into Object’:

Joseph Beuys and the Political Work of Social Sculpture

by

Andrea Dana Gyorody

Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

University of California, Los Angeles, 2017

Professor George Thomas Baker, Chair

This dissertation examines the political turn, circa 1967, in the work of German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986), and his concurrent development of the concept of “social sculpture,” which avowed that everyday actions imbued with creativity could re-shape society. Between 1967 and 1986, Beuys established several political action groups and a free university, lectured widely across Europe and the United States, and campaigned for public office. He also produced a wide-ranging oeuvre of objects, performances, and installations that concretized the rhetoric of his larger projects, while having their purview broadened in turn. This dissertation focuses on Beuys’s political organizations, multiples, and the installation *7000 Eichen* (7000 Oaks) in order to characterize how social sculpture manifested in his work and how it diverged from his stated motives. In contrast to the prevailing understanding of Beuys’s work as guided by a totalizing ideology and shamanistic self-mythology, this project demonstrates that Beuys’s work was rife

with contradiction, ambivalence, tension, doubt, and surprising openness and heterogeneity, all of which was brought to bear on his relationship with the Nazi past.

Chapter 1 traces the origins of Beuys's aesthetic ideology, which was informed by contemporaneous neo-avant-garde practices (notably Fluxus), Dada, nineteenth-century Romantic thought, the writings of Rudolf Steiner, and fascist rhetoric. It goes on to analyze Beuys's importation of political forms into artistic contexts under the banner of social sculpture and the impact of his continued creation of art objects alongside dialogic work. Chapter 2 turns to Beuys's production of multiples, arguing that the political work performed by the nascent medium was its staging of tensions between reproducibility and aura, repetition and difference, singularity and plurality, and, finally, individual and community—competing values with implications for Beuys's construction of authorship and authority. Chapter 3 presents a close study of the 1982-87 project *7000 Oaks*, installed for *documenta 7* in Kassel, Germany. Excavating the project's iconography and historical contexts exposes ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning, as well as social sculpture's dual backwards-looking and utopian aspirations, levels of complexity illuminated most effectively by successive generations of *documenta* artists.

The dissertation of Andrea Dana Gyorody is approved.

Miwon Kwon

Steven Nelson

Todd Presner

George Thomas Baker, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2017

For my grandparents

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From 2014 to 2017 I worked at LACMA, first as a Lenart Graduate Intern in Modern Art under the inimitable curator Stephanie Barron, and then as a curatorial assistant and later assistant curator in the Robert Gore Rifkind Center for German Expressionist Study, directed by Timothy O. Benson, the most kind-hearted supervisor one could hope for. My time at LACMA, dedicated entirely to the study and promotion of German art, was enriched by an abundance of exceptional colleagues, including Carol Eliel, Rachel Kaplan, David Karwan, Julia Kim, Jennie King, Ryan Linkof, Britt Salvesen, Sandy Williams, Erica Wrightson, and Katia Zavistovski. I was privileged to count among my friends Ellen Dooley, Carolyn Lifsey, Jessica Simmons, and Staci Steinberger before we landed at LACMA together, and my years at the museum would not have been nearly as enjoyable and productive without them. Among the many curators I worked with prior to LACMA, I reserve my deepest gratitude for Paul Schimmel, who has an infectious, expansive love for the profession, and who has been my champion ever since we met.

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While many parents—especially those who did not attend college—might discourage their children from pursuing art history as a career, my mother and late father never once questioned my desire and ability to follow this passion as far as it might take me. My maternal grandparents, Europeans who wound up in America after the tumult of World War II, instilled in me a love for language, history, and the *deftig* food of my forebears. Germany felt like home

because of them. My younger sister, Alexia, always seems to think that she owes me for my support, encouragement, and advice. In truth, it is quite the opposite—I am the one in debt to her for the honesty, humor, wisdom, and thoughtfulness she brings to my life every day.

My husband Todd, who read these acknowledgements over my shoulder and exclaimed, hastily, “But where am I?!”—to him I say: here you are. I have saved my most important, my most inadequate thanks for last, not just because it seems to be academic convention, but because none of the preceding work would have resulted in this finished dissertation had I not met you. Your unflagging faith in me has meant everything.

Vita

Education and Degrees Awarded

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Selected Publications

“This Sum of Catastrophes: Excavating the History of Joseph Beuys’s *7000 Oaks*,” in *Art and War*, German Visual Culture Series vol. 3, eds. Thomas O. Haakenson, Deborah Ascher Barnstone, and Barbara McCloskey (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017). *In press*.

A Guide to the Rifkind Center at LACMA, co-authored with Timothy O. Benson (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2017).

“The Medium and the Message: Art and Politics in the Work of Joseph Beuys,” *The Sixties: A Journal of History, Politics and Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (Summer 2015).

“‘Brand New’ Again: Brenna Youngblood’s Assemblages,” *Fore* (New York: The Studio Museum in Harlem, 2012).

Biographical essays on Alonzo Davis, Senga Nengudi, John Riddle, Ruth Waddy, Charles White, Tyrus Wong, and Self Help Graphics, *Now Dig This! Art and Black Los Angeles 1960-1980* (New York: Prestel in conjunction with the Hammer Museum, 2010).

“Edible Landscapes: Song Dong’s Food Installations,” co-authored with Charles Kang, *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (August 2010).

Selected Presentations

“Repetition and Difference in Joseph Beuys’s Multiples.” Invited speaker at a study day on Artists’ Publications: Revisions of Multiples and Conceptual Photography c. 1970, Universität zu Köln at the German Consulate, New York, NY, May 2016.

“The Persistence of the Object in ‘Dematerialized’ Social Practice Art.” Paper presented on the panel “Social Sculpture after Beuys: A Critical Reevaluation” at the Annual College Art Association Conference, Washington, D.C., February 2016.

“Thought into Action and Action into Object: Joseph Beuys and the Mobilized Multiple.” Paper

presented at the Curatorial Colloquium, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, Los Angeles, CA, October 2015.

“Repetition and Difference in Joseph Beuys’s Multiples.” Paper presented at On Seriality, German Studies Conference, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY, May 2015.

“Remediating the German Landscape: Joseph Beuys’s *7000 Oaks* and the Specter of Nazi Environmentalism.” Paper presented at UCLA Art History Graduate Student Association Symposium, Los Angeles, CA, October 2014.

“On the Lives of the Object: Beuys’s Multiples from Conception to Conservation.” Invited speaker at study day on Joseph Beuys: Multiples in Museums, co-organized by the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard and the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich, Germany, December 2013.

Selected Academic and Professional Experience

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2014	Lenart Graduate Intern, Department of Modern Art, LACMA.
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Selected Honors and Fellowships

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Introduction

In 1967, at the age of 46, German artist Joseph Beuys founded a new political party. Having never before espoused an explicitly political position in public, he alighted on an idea in a student discussion forum at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, where he was a professor of sculpture, and rather abruptly decided to form a party to be called the *Deutsche Studentenpartei*, or German Student Party. Together with a few student-acolytes, Beuys invited the press to an announcement at the Kunstakademie, and then formalized the party with an application to state government a few days later. Beuys's turn to politics, and to a totalizing philosophy he termed *soziale Plastik*, or social sculpture, was not to be short-lived: in the nearly two decades between founding the German Student Party and suffering from a fatal heart attack in 1986, Beuys would establish several political action groups and a free university, lecture widely across Europe and the United States, run for office three times, and successfully carry out a large-scale environmental installation that entailed the planting of thousands of trees. All the while, he was also constantly creating what amounted to a wide-ranging body of objects, performances, and installations that concretized the rhetoric of his larger projects, while having their purview broadened in turn. This dissertation focuses on Beuys's series of political organizations; his production of multiples; and his project *7000 Oaks* in order to understand what social sculpture looks like in practice, especially in the hands of an artist who was known as a charismatic, authoritative persona, and who had troubling ties to Germany's Nazi past. The picture of social sculpture that emerges from these various forms shows that Beuys's work was often rife with

contradiction, ambivalence, tension, doubt, and surprising openness and heterogeneity. Beuys fell short of effecting wide-ranging social change, the impact of his work largely limited to the art world in which he conducted it. In failing, however, Beuys illuminated the social and artistic conditions that made his work possible and also kept it from achieving its aims.

*

1966, the year prior to Beuys's establishment of the German Student Party, had witnessed the birth of a "Grand Coalition" in West Germany, formed out of an alliance between the Christian Democrats and the Social Democrats, the largest center-right and center-left parties in the country, which together controlled ninety-five percent of parliament. Seeing no viable opposition party within the ranks of the Bundestag, and no possibility for true progressivism at the federal level, students across West Germany became vocally critical of parliamentary democracy and began forming what became known as the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (extraparlimentary opposition). Invigorated by a growing spirit of dissent and opposition, and sensing in his own students a desire to confront the political failures of post-war Germany, Beuys convened a series of discussion forums in spring 1967 at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, where he had been professor of monumental sculpture for several years (Fig. 0.1). He opened his studio to students who wanted to vent their disenchantment with the democratic process, their frustrations over Europe's involvement with the war in Vietnam, and their disappointment with their parents' and grandparents' failure to adequately come to terms with the atrocities of the Second World War. Beuys's decision to hold lengthy meetings with students to talk politics rankled his conservative colleagues, ultimately driving them to attempt (unsuccessfully) to oust him from the academy in 1968. Despite opposition within the academy, Beuys pressed on, no doubt empowered by news of antiwar and antifascist rallies in Berlin; continuing protests against

the Vietnam War in the Bay Area; and the massive peace demonstration, with hundreds of thousands of participants, that marched in New York from Central Park to the United Nations headquarters in April 1967.

By early summer of that year, Beuys's slowly developing program gained increased urgency and direction. On June 2, leftist Benno Ohnesorg was shot in Berlin in the back of the head while peacefully protesting the official state visit of Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, Iran's controversial monarch. (Students were protesting his repressive reactions to dissent, his ravenous stockpiling of military grade armaments, and his generally dictatorial tendencies; several months later he would crown himself emperor.) Ohnesorg, who died instantly, could not have been a more sympathetic figure: he was a twenty-six year-old student and poet, with a wife who was expecting their first child, and he had not committed any act that would warrant the use of deadly force. Dominating the front pages of newspapers across Germany the following day was a photograph taken of his limp body and youthful face cradled in the hands of a furious female bystander, an image that powerfully evoked the tragic motif of the Pieta and situated Ohnesorg as the movement's first martyr (Fig. 0.2). Though it has since been revealed that Karl-Heinz Kurras, the officer who killed Ohnesorg, was a covert operative of the East German Stasi, at the time of the shooting he was decried by the left as a symbol of the increasingly authoritarian West German state—a perfect embodiment of the regime the students had been protesting in the first place.¹ Rallying against what they saw as an oppressive administration masquerading as a liberal democracy, German students and their allies would not allow Ohnesorg's death to go unavenged,

¹ It has only recently been revealed that the man who shot Ohnesorg was a Stasi agent who was likely directed to kill a demonstrator in order to escalate protests and ultimately destabilize West Germany. He maintains that the Stasi did not order the murder, which he claims was an accident. See "The Truth about the Gunshot that Changed Germany," *Spiegel* Online, last modified May 28, 2009, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/1968-revisited-the-truth-about-the-gunshot-that-changed-germany-a-627342.html>.

mobilizing by the thousands in what became known as the *68-er Bewegung* (68er Movement). Together with the 1968 assassination attempt on Rudi Dutschke, the charismatic spokesperson of the *Sozialistischer Deutsche Studentenbund* (Socialist German Student Union), Ohnesorg's unprovoked shooting also emboldened a radical segment of the far left to respond in kind. The organizations that terrorized West Germany in the 1970s, including the *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army Faction, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group) and the anarchist *Bewegung 2. Juni* (2nd of June Movement), which took its name from the date of Ohnesorg's death, were born out of the same bloody event and its aftermath.

More immediately, Ohnesorg's murder catalyzed Beuys into action in Düsseldorf, giving him the momentum to crystallize abstract student discussions into a concrete path forward. On a morning late in June, Beuys posted a sign in the academy announcing that a new political party addressing the concerns of students would be founded that very afternoon. Hoping to garner attention beyond the academy, he asked one of his protégés, Johannes Stüttgen, to alert the local press. Much to Stüttgen's surprise, as he later recalled, a handful of journalists showed up, no doubt anticipating an amusing spectacle. Stüttgen, who published a thousand-page tome in 2008 chronicling Beuys's years at the Kunstakademie, wrote of the event, "To the 'politicians' the whole thing seemed to be naïve and purely artistic, while to the artists it all appeared too political."² The unease of the motley crew assembled that day was heightened by the appearance of the academy's director, who informed the crowd that "political activities" were forbidden from taking place on the property of a state-run school. Thinking quickly, Beuys moved

² Johannes Stüttgen, *Der Ganze Riemen: Der Auftritt von Joseph Beuys als Lehrer—die Chronologie der Ereignisse an der Staatlichen Kunstakademie Düsseldorf 1966-72* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König with the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, 2008), 79. The original reads, "Den 'Politischen' scheint das Ganze naiv und nur künstlerisch zu sein, den Künstlern erscheint es als zu politisch," my translation.

everyone to the academy's public front lawn, where he promptly declared the official formation of what he had named the *Deutsche Studentenpartei*—the German Student Party (Fig. 0.3).

Despite the hints of the political already detectable in the realm of art in Europe and the United States in 1967, few observers could have anticipated how insistently political Beuys's work would be after that moment. What looked like a stunt on the lawn of the art academy was, in retrospect, an opening move. Beuys's founding of the German Student Party constituted a pivotal moment in which Beuys took the form of the political party, a bureaucratic organization structured through community and hierarchy, and imported it wholesale into an artistic context. The unease of observers that day indicated the extent to which this was something new, with unclear consequences. Art had already taken up the messy forms of radical protest and absurdist performance, but not the forms that "real" politics used to effect arrangements of power in society at large. Beuys's founding of the party would be followed by ever more elaborate projects, performances, and installations. But while Beuys talked about collapsing the borders that separate art and politics to allow politics to be transformed by creativity, he insistently sited his work in the institutions of the art world, limiting its effectiveness a priori. He also produced an incredible number of artworks (many of them multiples) that betrayed his self-doubt as well as his knowledge of art's limitations to effect change in society as it existed then—and surely still exists today.

The Eternal Hitler Youth

"Where [...] mistrust has entered to the slightest degree, it is all too easy to confuse things and to throw out the precious with the worthless."³

³ Beuys, qtd. in *Das Goetheanum. Wochenschrift für Anthroposophie* 27 (July 3, 1994): 310f.

The details of Beuys's early life and career throw into relief his later development of social sculpture and his adoption of political forms.⁴ Born in 1921 in Krefeld and raised in nearby Kleve, Beuys was eighteen years old at the outbreak of World War II and volunteered for the air force after completing high school in 1940. He served as a radio operator and second pilot; during the invasion of southern Russia and Crimea in 1944, his plane was shot down, killing the main pilot and severely injuring Beuys. The well-known story that Beuys began to tell around 1970, of being rehabilitated after the plane crash by nomadic Tatars with wrappings of fat and felt, has been vociferously contested and disproven by recent scholars and journalists, but the crash itself has been substantiated.⁵ After being captured by the British in 1945, Beuys was interned in a prisoner-of-war camp for several months before returning to his parents' home in Kleve, which had been nearly decimated by Allied bombing. In 1946 he enrolled at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, where he studied under the well-regarded sculptor Ewald Mataré. There he was first exposed to the philosophical writings of Rudolf Steiner, the early-twentieth-century founder of Anthroposophy, a movement that emphasized freedom, spirituality, and creativity as the basis of individual growth and social well-being.

Beuys's earliest work consists largely of fragmentary, figurative sculpture crafted from simple materials such as wood and metal—objects clearly influenced on the one hand by Mataré's interest in organicism and, on the other, by Beuys's wartime experiences and the

⁴ See, for example, Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys* [1987] (Berlin: Ullrich Buchverlage, 2010); and Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, and Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys* [1973], trans. Patricia Lech (New York: Barron's, 1979).

⁵ For the most comprehensive treatment of the crash story, see Peter Nisbet, "Crash Course: Remarks on a Beuys Story," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (New York: D.A.P. with The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), 5-17. See also Hans Peter Riegel, *Beuys: Die Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2013) and Frank Gieseke and Albert Markert, *Flieger, Filz und Vaterland* (Berlin: Elefanten Press, 1996). Most recently, the German magazine *Der Spiegel* reported the discovery of a letter written by Beuys to the parents of his fallen co-pilot, which makes no mention of a miraculous rescue; see Ulrike Knöfel, "Flug in die Ewigkeit," *Der Spiegel* 28 (August 7, 2013): 118-123.

realities of making art in a city that remained war-torn long after the official end of the conflict. In the 1950s Beuys's output expanded to include prints, drawings, and watercolors, mostly depicting the human figure and themes drawn from the natural world, nodding to the lingering influence of pre-war German Expressionism. He also began to create sculptures and drawings using non-traditional materials, including beeswax, asphalt, gauze, sand, dirt, and fat. These materials' inherent chemical instability over time underscored Beuys's understanding of art as perpetual process, subject to the entropic forces of nature much like any other organic substance, with no claim to eternal transcendence or permanence.

Beuys's departure from traditional sculpture in the late 1950s gave way, in the early 1960s, to his more holistic reconsideration of art and its role in society. Drawing on his reading of Steiner, Beuys conceptualized what he referred to as the *erweiterte Kunstbegriff* (expanded notion of art), which broadened art to the larger category of creativity and advocated dissolution between the spheres of art and other human activities. The blending of art and life implied by the "expanded notion of art" was consonant, at least superficially, with the aims of the Fluxus movement with which Beuys was at that time intimately involved.⁶ Fluxus was a decentralized association with affiliated artists in cities in the United States, Western Europe, and East Asia; drawing directly from Dada, Fluxus was conceived by George Maciunas and his compatriots as anti-art, anti-commodity, and anti-*l'art pour l'art*.⁷ Rejecting the artist-genius of 1950s Abstract Expressionism, Fluxus emphasized instead collaborative, interdisciplinary artistic production. Beuys initially helped Fluxus artists stage concerts in Germany, becoming a performance artist

⁶ In 1962, the Korean artist Nam June Paik introduced Beuys to Fluxus's unofficial leader, George Maciunas, who was then stationed at a US military base in Wiesbaden. Beuys subsequently worked with Paik and Maciunas to organize a number of concerts and festivals in Germany between 1962 and 1964. On Beuys's introduction to Fluxus, see, for example, Adriani, Konnertz, Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, 49-50.

⁷ See, for example, Hannah Higgins, *Fluxus Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Ken Friedman, ed., *The Fluxus Reader* (New York: Academy Editions, 1998).

himself only after seeing their work in the early 1960s. His relationship with Fluxus would not last long, largely thanks to Maciunas's disapproval of his work, but it did provide a formative context for his own development past the boundaries of traditional forms of art-making, as I discuss further in Chapter 1.⁸

In 1964, as Beuys's relationship with Fluxus began to wane, the elemental facets of his self-mythology came into focus. In July of that year, Beuys published the text piece *Lebenslauf—Werklauf* (Life Vita—Work Vita) in the catalogue for the Aachen exhibition *Festival der neuen Kunst* (Festival of New Art).⁹ A fanciful curriculum vitae, the text listed important moments in Beuys's artistic career alongside life events, some more conceptual than actual (Fig. 0.4). Next to 1921, the year of his birth, Beuys wrote, "Exhibition of a wound drawn together with a plaster," an enigmatic declaration of his tendencies toward sculpture and a conception of art as healing from the very beginning. *Lebenslauf—Werklauf* had two paradoxical effects. While it melded Beuys's life and work, blurring the boundaries between private and public in the spirit of Fluxus, it also helped establish Beuys's burgeoning self-mythology, which was precisely what many of the Fluxus artists found regressive (and what many others no doubt found captivating).

Beuys's construction of persona was also boosted by the many performances he conducted in the 1960s, beginning with *Kukei/Akopee-nein/Brown Cross/Fat Corners/Model Fat Corner*, which was performed at the 1964 Aachen festival for which Beuys produced his vita. *Kukei/Akopee-nein* is best remembered for its final, unchoreographed moments, captured on camera. Before Beuys had finished his *Aktion*, the audience stormed the stage and one of the

⁸ Some Fluxus artists, Paik in particular, supported Beuys's performance practice and sought further collaboration, while Maciunas and others were displeased to find that Beuys's work emphasized spirituality and myth, adhered to outmoded notions of authorship, and generated a cultish following. Joan Rothfuss provides a fascinating account of the antagonism between Beuys and the Fluxus artists in her essay "Joseph Beuys: Echoes in America," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray, 37-53.

⁹ *Lebenslauf—Werklauf* was re-worked and updated several times, with a final version published in 1969.

participants punched Beuys in the face; bloodied, Beuys held out a crucifix in one hand and raised his other arm in a gesture reminiscent, at once, of the *Heil Hitler*, the classic orator's gesture for silence, and iconic representations of Christ bestowing a blessing (Fig. 0.5). Several months later, in December 1964, Beuys performed *Der Chef / Fluxus Gesang* (The Chief / Fluxus Chant) as the inaugural event of the Galerie René Block in Berlin. For the performance, he spent eight hours on the floor inside a giant roll of felt with dead hares at either end, while making guttural sounds into a microphone (Fig. 0.6). The premise of the performance was that Beuys was "transmitting" the sounds to the American artist Robert Morris, who was supposed to be lying on the floor of his own studio in New York to "receive" them. But Morris, without informing Beuys, had decided not to participate.¹⁰ In retrospect, the incident elucidates not only Beuys's growing isolation and alienation from the avant-garde art world, but even more importantly, the discrepancy between his communicative goals and his lukewarm reception. His 1965 performance *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* (How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare) thematized failed communication even further (Figs. 0.7-8). Beuys conducted the majority of the *Aktion*—in which he explained drawings to a dead hare cradled in his arms—inside the Galerie Schmela in Düsseldorf, with the audience forced to stand outside and watch the proceedings, without the aid of sound, through the front window. If Beuys indeed had a message, it seemed that he had little faith that it would be heard, much less understood and acted upon.

It was around this time, while Beuys was actively performing, teaching, and making all sorts of objects, that he developed his "expanded notion of art" into what he called "social sculpture." Here I want to offer a working definition of social sculpture, which I will elaborate further through example in the rest of the dissertation. I understand social sculpture to be both a

¹⁰ See Rothfuss, "Joseph Beuys: Echoes in America," 37-53.

set of beliefs, which Beuys espoused, as well as a nominal category that we can use to describe works of art. As a set of beliefs or propositions, social sculpture derives from Romantic aesthetic ideology and the writings of Rudolf Steiner. Social sculpture avows that 1) every human has an innate capacity for creativity, imagination, and intuition, which are contrasted with logic and reason; 2) the capacity for creativity can be exercised through any daily activity (not just artistic activities, like making a painting or writing a poem); 3) individual creative acts can and should be directed towards social betterment; and finally, 4) the “social organism” is itself “a work of art,” which is to say that it is a sculpture-in-becoming, constantly being acted upon by the individuals who make up that society. When social sculpture is used to characterize a particular work of art in Beuys’s practice, it is often used expansively; sometimes Beuys seems to say that he practices social sculpture in all that he does, because he is always exercising his creativity, while at other times, he describes individual scenarios, events, lectures, or performances as social sculptures, meaning that they model through their form the individual action that the concept of social sculpture elicits.

Social sculpture, in and of itself, does not demand that it be embodied in political forms like the German Student Party. Theoretically, any activity could qualify as social sculpture, whether or not it makes its political aims explicit; creativity, according to Beuys, always does political work. What I find interesting is that just as Beuys begins to articulate the outlines of social sculpture, he immediately latches on to the forms of bureaucratic politics as a way to embody the tenets of his ideology in a form that already has political potency outside of artistic convention. Political forms, in other words, seemed to allow Beuys to stage social sculpture and propagandize it simultaneously. The publicness afforded by political organizations offered a

natural way to package social sculpture as a political platform that could be disseminated through the usual channels of political speech.

If Beuys had had a specific political orientation before he founded the student party in 1967, it was not manifest in his work, and biographies of the artist contain no mention of politics in his life prior to this date.¹¹ His political awakening stems, as far as one can tell, from a general awareness of widespread disenchantment with post-war democracy and from his encounters with students at the Kunstakademie. Typical for its time, the Kunstakademie was a place of artistic experimentation but not one of direct political action or discourse. Many faculty were relatively conservative both in their aesthetic tastes and in their tolerance for disruption.¹² Beuys was seen by a number of his colleagues as little more than a nuisance, a cult figure parading around with his Fluxus friends and garnering droves of acolytes at the academy and beyond—more an ideologue, in short, than a pedagogue. When Beuys flaunted the norms of the academy by mobilizing students to join a conceptual political party, faculty and administrators were quick to deride him because they did not think the classroom was a place for politics, and because they simply had had enough of Beuys. The year after the establishment of the German Student Party, as the student movement was rapidly growing in number, nine of Beuys's fellow professors wrote a public letter decrying Beuys's "presumptuous political dilettantism, passion for

¹¹ Further discovery in the Joseph-Beuys-Archiv at Schloss Moyland in Kleve might yield a more satisfying answer about Beuys's political life—or at the least, his voting or registration records—prior to 1967. It would be fair to say, however, that even if Beuys had been a staunch member of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD) to that point, he did not make it publicly known, nor was he seen as particularly political. (He did explicitly decry the SPD as ineffectual later in his life, and even then, did not make mention of earlier involvement.) There is also no evidence that he had any connection to the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (SDS) or any other progressive political association, although his own views on issues such as parliamentary democracy and nuclear weapons often overlapped with theirs.

¹² Despite all of the attempts in the late 1950s and 60s to undercut the conservative presuppositions that had guided artistic production up to that time, many artists, critics, art historians, and art institutions held on to formalist modernism and the idea of "autonomous art."

ideological tutelage, and un-collegial spirit,” as well as his “clearly documented determination against authority.” They further advocated for his dismissal from the academy, and while they failed to oust him in 1968, he continued to court controversy, ultimately resulting in his forcible removal four years later.¹³

Two book-length studies in German have examined Beuys’s turn to political action: Barbara Lange’s *Joseph Beuys: Richtkräfte einer neuen Gesellschaft: Der Mythos vom Künstler als Gesellschaftsreformer* (Joseph Beuys: Directive forces of a new society: The myth of the artist as social reformer), 1999, and Andreas Quermann’s *‘Demokratie ist lustig’: Der politische Künstler Joseph Beuys* (‘Democracy is merry’: The political artist Joseph Beuys), 2006. Both studies, reacting belatedly to the predominance of hagiographic scholarship around Beuys’s work, are concerned primarily with demystifying Beuys’s persona by laying bare the elements of his evolving self-construction. Lange, focusing on Beuys’s tumultuous years at the Kunstakademie, charges Beuys with propagating an artistic authority based around the symbiosis of body, subject position, and artwork.¹⁴ Borrowing liberally from Lange’s argument, Quermann paints Beuys’s political activities up to 1972 as sophisticated and manipulative political theater in which Beuys acted out “the symbol of the ideal collective body of a homogenous national community (*Völksgemeinschaft*),” which he then invited his followers to mimic in turn.¹⁵ It is no accident that throughout his book, Quermann describes Beuys’s ideas using terms, including *Völksgemeinschaft*, that are still strongly associated with the Third Reich, implying that Beuys dangerously extended the legacy of Nazi cultism.

¹³ Qtd. in Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas.

¹⁴ Barbara Lange, *Joseph Beuys: Richtkräfte einer neuen Gesellschaft: Der Mythos vom Künstler als Gesellschaftsreformer* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1999), 242.

¹⁵ Andreas Quermann, *‘Demokratie ist lustig’: Der politische Künstler Joseph Beuys* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2006), 201.

Lange and Quermann both treat Beuys as a charismatic charlatan, echoing Benjamin H. D. Buchloh's famous polemic against the artist in the pages of *Artforum Magazine* in January 1980, which begins, bombastically enough, with a lengthy quotation from Friedrich Nietzsche on "The Case of Wagner," and is titled, in similar fashion, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol."¹⁶ Although Lange and Quermann address political aspects of Beuys's oeuvre with much greater attention than Buchloh, neither author aims to analyze the implications of Beuys's work outside of his construction of self—this, too, could be said of Buchloh's text, which concerns itself exclusively with the artist and declines for the most part to discuss his work, that is, his production of objects, performances, installations, and so on. For all three writers, the real work *is* the formation of artistic authority, not the promotion of a political message or an artistic one, for that matter. That may ring somewhat true, but it is also the case that Beuys's political work has had undeniable and lasting reverberations, especially in its influence on successive generations of artists dedicated to social reform as artistic practice. The acknowledgement that Beuys was a masterful self-mythologizer (like many other artists and certainly many great politicians) should not foreclose careful readings of his work, particularly in light of the fact that Beuys's work has remained relevant even in the absence of his persona.

The issue of Beuys's self-mythology and his role in the Second World War have, nevertheless, foreclosed sustained engagement with his work in the United States for many years. Buchloh's 1980 essay made the stakes of the matter clear, and undoubtedly scared off American critics who dared to tread the German ground Buchloh and Beuys shared.¹⁷ On the occasion of

¹⁶ Benjamin Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum* (January 1980): 35-40.

¹⁷ The one major exception is Donald Kuspit, who became the primary critical champion of Neo-Expressionism in the US and sang Beuys's praises throughout the 1980s; he did not necessarily do Beuys any favors, however, in positioning his work as a source for the return of Expressionism and the

Beuys's major retrospective at the Guggenheim Museum—which was especially contentious since the Guggenheim had recently cancelled a politically problematic show by Hans Haacke—Buchloh wrote, “In the work and public myth of Joseph Beuys, the German spirit of the postwar period finds its new identity by pardoning and reconciling itself prematurely with its own reminiscences of a responsibility for one of the most cruel and devastating forms of collective political madness that history has known.”¹⁸ The complete dismissal of Beuys that followed was possible, I believe, because Americans were only partially acquainted with Beuys's work. New Yorkers might have heard about his 1974 performance *I Like America and America Likes Me*, in which Beuys and a coyote co-habitated in René Block's gallery for several days; and New Yorkers and others on the circuit of his 1974 lecture tour might have encountered Beuys the pedagogue, giving lectures (in very clumsy English) to audiences mostly comprised of students. Several exhibitions of his multiples had given audiences a sense of his interest in reproducible media. But the Guggenheim show brought Beuys's monumental sculptures and vitrines to the United States for the first time, proving overwhelming and alienating for those confronting the complete breadth of his work in sculpture, drawing, installation, performance, and social sculpture (which had a decidedly low profile in the show).¹⁹ A recent Beuys documentary

“representation of German subjectivity.” See Kuspit, “Joseph Beuys: The Body of the Artist,” *Artforum* 29, no. 10 (Summer 1991): 80-86.

¹⁸ Buchloh, “Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol,” *Artforum* (January 1980): 39. It is worth noting that John Russell, writing a preview of Beuys's exhibition for *The New York Times*, took a decidedly different approach, though his more measured review has been long forgotten. Russell discusses Beuys's interest in “direct democracy” and his various (failed) campaigns for political office, noting that “Beuys the politician and Beuys the artist are the same man” (42-95). His characterization of Beuys as “profoundly and unalterably German” deserves quotation in full: “He has the pertinacity, the craving for absolutes, the intense poetic fancy and the gift for abstract formulation which for centuries were fundamental to most of the German achievements which we held in honor. But there are many kinds of Germans, and there is no greater mistake than to confuse one kind with another” (95). “The Shaman As Artist,” *The New York Times Magazine*, October 28, 1979: 40-42, 95, 103-104, 108-109.

includes footage of visitors emerging from the Guggenheim and giving their unvarnished opinions of the show; a few of them look shell-shocked, having found the work totally incomprehensible and even revolting, while a few express intrigue, believing there is more behind the work than they were able to grasp, but finding it interesting enough. At that time, Beuys scholarship in English consisted only of a handful of exhibition reviews, interviews with Willoughby Sharp, and the lengthy hagiographic excursions by English critic Caroline Tisdall that one could find in the Guggenheim exhibition catalogue. More evenhanded and critical interpretations in English were largely not forthcoming after Buchloh's screed.

In "The Twilight of the Idol," Buchloh comes close to accusing Beuys of a kind of unrepentant Nazism, stopping short at the allegation that Beuys's motivation for fictionalizing the crash story was to sidestep his culpability for the grave misdeeds of the Nazi regime.²⁰ The notion that Beuys might have continued to harbor and propagandize Nazi ideology was strongly implied in Quermann's text, and has been taken up much more explicitly in recent years by a

¹⁹ I was surprised to uncover in my archival research numerous indications that Beuys could have had a much earlier, bi-coastal reception in the United States. Although many texts on Beuys claim that he refused to come to the US in the late 60s and early 70s because of his objections to US involvement in the Vietnam War, the papers of his Düsseldorf gallerist Alfred Schmela offer a more mundane explanation. Schmela's files contain a trove of inquiries between 1968 and 1970 from US galleries and museums, including the Detroit Institute of the Arts; Gallery 669 in Los Angeles (owned by Eugenia Butler and Riko Mizuno); Sonnabend Gallery in New York; and the Walker Art Center, where Martin Friedman wanted Beuys's work to be the centerpiece of the exhibition that would open the Walker's new building in 1971. (The National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo and Ileana Sonnabend's Paris gallery also petitioned Schmela unsuccessfully for access to Beuys.) Schmela's responses, always in the negative, regretfully informed these institutions that "at the moment no work whatsoever is available"—which was the case not because Beuys did not want to participate in the American art world, but because he had sold almost all of his work in 1966 to the German cosmetics mogul Karl Ströher and truthfully had no work to send. Folders 9, 12A, 14, 30, and 35, Box 123 (Beuys artist files), Galerie Schmela records, 1923-2006 (bulk 1957-1992), The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

²⁰ Buchloh is not the only English-language writer to propose troubling links between Beuys and Nazism. For a number of years, art historian Kristine Stiles has lectured on Beuys's military service and subsequent work with a presentation titled "'Props for the Memory', or Joseph Beuys and the Legacy of Fascism." I have not heard her lectures myself, and she has not allowed the lectures to be transcribed or videotaped, as she believes that her research is likely to be misunderstood as a condemnation of Beuys absent the fuller context that a book-length study, which she is now preparing, might provide. Stiles, email correspondence with the author, January 18, 2017.

series of German writers. Frank Gieseke and Albert Markert claimed in a 1996 book that Beuys had been openly nostalgic for the Nazi regime and borrowed his philosophies from proto-fascist *völkisch* myths. Swiss art historian Beat Wyss repeated those allegations in 2008 in the pages of the art magazine *Monopol*, calling Beuys an “eternal Hitler youth” who “swam like a fish in the water of the fascist Zeitgeist” and, as an adult, cathartically reenacted his Nazi schooling through what appeared to be progressive activism.²¹ The contention that Beuys was a Nazi wolf in sheep’s clothing also forms the backbone of the latest and most extensive denunciation, a 500-page biography of the artist published in 2013 by Hans Peter Riegel, a former student of Beuys’s protégé Jörg Immendorff. In *Beuys: Die Biographie*, Riegel recycles material from Gieseke, Markert, and Wyss and adds evidence that Beuys sustained life-long associations with Nazi sympathizers, including the prominent collectors Karl Ströher and Erich Marx, the writer Karl Fastabend, and the journalist August Haussleiter, who, like Beuys, was a founding member of the German Green Party.

The evidence that Riegel presents on these figures is hard to ignore: they were eager members of the Nazi Party before and during World War II, making it difficult to imagine that they were ever fully emancipated or cleansed of those allegiances and their attendant ideologies. But it must be said that many figures in post-war Germany routinely maintained friendships with former Nazis, and the spheres of contemporary art and progressive politics were not immune to the presence of former fascists, like nearly all social networks in East and West Germany. To attribute sinister motivation to Beuys’s associations is to ignore the extent to which mingling

²¹ Beat Wyss, “Der ewige Hitlerjunge,” *Monopol* 10 (2008): 81-83. *Monopol* also published a number of reactions to the article by artists and art historians, who were split in their defense and disavowal of Beuys. See “Wyss vs. Beuys: Die Reaktionen,” last modified April 3, 2009, <http://www.monopol-magazin.de/wyss-vs-beuys-die-reaktionen>.

with former fascists, socially and professionally, was a matter of inescapable historical circumstance for several decades after the war.

The ambivalence that I and many other scholars feel towards the issue of Beuys's Nazi affiliations was dramatized in the summer of 2017 at the latest iteration of *documenta*, an exhibition littered with references to Beuys, who participated six consecutive times between 1964 and 1986 (and in 1987, when his work was presented posthumously). Beuys's monumental sculpture *The Pack*, consisting of a Volkswagen bus and two dozen wooden sleds, together with a number of drawings and several vitrines, occupies a permanent gallery space in the Neue Galerie, one of *documenta*'s main venues, and always "mingles" in some way with the work that *documenta* curators install in the neighboring gallery. This time the choice was extremely pointed. Placed next to the Beuys gallery was Polish artist Piotr Uklanski's 2017 installation *Real Nazis*, a wall of framed photographic reproductions of portraits of Nazi officers, from the bottom of the ranks all the way up to Hitler himself (Fig. 0.9). (The installation plays on the name of Uklanski's 1998 project, *The Nazis*, which brings together 164 images of actors playing Nazis in fictionalized films about World War II.) Down on the bottom right of *Real Nazis*, in the lowest row of pictures, was a photograph of Beuys, taken when he was a very young pilot in the German air force.

Today, Beuys's crash story is mentioned prodigiously in scholarly texts, museum didactics, and exhibition reviews, but outside of the critical texts I discussed above, Beuys is never referred to as a "Nazi," never mind a "real Nazi." When I encountered Uklanski's work this summer, I happened to linger long enough to overhear a conversation among participants in a *documenta*-sponsored tour conducted in German. The tour guide pointed out the photo of Beuys and received a few blank stares in response. Abruptly, one woman in the group announced,

“Yes, he crashed his plane.” The guide concurred, and another tour participant interjected, “He was a pilot, yes, but not a *real* Nazi. He was of a different mind.” The guide, with a patient face that suggested he had rehearsed this exact discussion a number of times already, pointed out that Beuys in fact volunteered for service, and had been a Hitler Youth as well. The group was quiet, and the tour guide shrugged with his whole body, as if to say he was as stumped as the rest of them, before they moved on to the next gallery. I could not have more perfectly scripted how I imagine most people, especially mixed generations of Germans, feel about Beuys’s involvement with the Nazi party and the crimes of the Nazi regime. It is easy to say that Goebbels and Hitler and Himmler and the rest were real Nazis, along with their commanding officers and the foot-soldiers who helped run the camps, or who had helped exterminate Jews and other “undesirables” before the camps had been built. But is a young boy, who signs up for the Hitler Youth having known no other regime, and later flies in Hitler’s air force—is he, too, a real Nazi? Even if we have no evidence that he believed, in his youth or adulthood, in the most appalling aspects of Nazi ideology?

This is a question that I do not believe we can answer. We can ask, instead, what relationship his work evinced to the Nazi past, and when we ask that question, I believe we can better understand his artistic practice, even if we cannot settle the issue of his culpability for the Holocaust. In Chapters 1 and 3, I attempt to address the relationship of Beuys’s work to the Nazi past explicitly, first with respect to Beuys’s invocations of Romantic and fascist aesthetic ideology, and later with respect to the Nazi iconography that informs *7000 Oaks*. Following Gene Ray, I argue that Beuys called up the Nazi past in his work not to valorize or extend it, and not out of nostalgia or insidious motive, but as a way to engage in the process of coming to terms with the past, and as a way to call others to do the same. His work engages ambiguity and

ambivalence in a fashion we might find troubling, but I believe it is an honest and sincere attempt to grapple with a traumatic past in which he played a part.

Despite unresolved questions about Beuys's military service, attempts at discrediting his legacy have been met with renewed interest in his work in Germany and the United States. Recent retrospectives in Germany have focused on his political work (*Die Revolution sind wir* [We Are the Revolution] at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin in 2008) and his parallel developments of different "work blocks" (*Parallelprozesse* [Parallel Processes] at Düsseldorf's Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in 2010-11), while major works and installations have also been conserved and newly displayed, including the multi-room installation *Block Beuys* at the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt and the Beuys collections at the Museum Kurhaus Kleve and the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld. Finally, the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard University partnered with the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich to carry out a two-year research study on Beuys's multiples, from 2012-14, during which they hosted a study session for young scholars in both countries whose work focuses on Beuys.²² The partnership also generated rotating multiples exhibitions at both institutions, where Beuys's work remains on constant view.

²² Quite a number of Beuys-related projects are either currently underway or have been recently completed, including monographic dissertations by Cara Jordan (CUNY, 2017), Daniel Spaulding (Yale, 2017), Alison Weaver (CUNY, in progress), and Maja Wismer (University of Basel, in progress). Additionally, a number of young art historians have recently considered Beuys's work in a larger context, including Max Rosenberg, who has written on the history of documenta (Yale, 2015); Rachel Jans, whose dissertation charts the development of René Block's gallery (University of Chicago, 2014); Lisa Lee, who considers Beuys's redefinitions of sculpture as a model for her comparative study of Thomas Hirschhorn and Isa Genzken (Princeton, 2012); and Andrew Weiner, whose dissertation addresses the imbrications of art and politics in post-1968 West Germany and Austria (University of California, Berkeley, 2011).

Methodology and Research

The renewed interest in Beuys over the last decade influenced the development of this dissertation, which began after I visited a comprehensive exhibition of Beuys's multiples from the collection of the Broad Foundation, curated by Stephanie Barron at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in 2009. I decided to make Beuys's multiples a primary focus of my study when I found very little written on them outside of the catalogue raisonné, despite the richness and vastness of the more than 500 objects that Beuys produced as multiples. While the multiples themselves do political work, as I argue in Chapter 2, I also wanted to understand how they functioned under the broader ideological rubric Beuys had constructed, namely the concept of social sculpture. Not every multiple explicitly propagandizes one of Beuys's proposals or projects, but he understood the form of the multiple to be crucial to extending his general message. While many writers have argued that the object became less important to Beuys's work once he had articulated the aims of social sculpture and adopted forms of political action to spread its message, I argue the opposite: objects became more important for Beuys than ever before. Seeing the multiples as part and parcel of the unfolding of social sculpture as a concept in Beuys's work (which culminated in the multiple-like installation *7000 Oaks*) allowed me to connect my overall project with the foremost aspect of Beuys's legacy: the predominance of socially-based artistic practices among contemporary artists working today.

The term "social sculpture" is referenced today as an explanatory model for projects as diverse as Theaster Gates's *Dorchester Projects*, a community re-development effort in Chicago; the late Christoph Schlingensief's satirical political party, *Chance 2000*, and a number of other absurdist, performative projects he staged in Germany and Austria in the 1990s and 2000s; and Tania Bruguera's current political work, which has included the establishment of a long-running

art school, *Cátedra Arte de Conducta*, and the Hannah Arendt International Institute of Activism. The participatory aspects of many of these social-sculptural projects have also inspired the frequent invocation of the catchphrase “Everyone is an artist,” which did not originate with Beuys but is indelibly linked to him, particularly in these contexts. The motto and the larger ideology to which it appeals are rarely interrogated, though they are by no means straightforward or self-evident. I aim in the dissertation to unpack and complicate the forms and outcomes of social sculpture, and in the epilogue, I offer tentative thoughts about what contemporary social practice might stand to gain from a more thorough scholarly account of Beuysian social sculpture.

This dissertation is the product of extensive research conducted between 2012 and 2017, including two years spent in Cologne and Berlin from 2012-14. In 2012, I examined over 150 multiples in storage at the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard, where I was able to consult with registrars and conservators. I subsequently visited Beuys collections and exhibitions at the Museum of Modern Art, New York; Museum Schloss Moyland, Bedburg-Hau; Hamburger Bahnhof Museum and Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin; Museum Ludwig, Cologne; Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt; K20 Grabbepplatz, Kunstsammlung NRW, Düsseldorf; Neue Galerie; Kassel; Museum Kurhaus, Kleve; Tate Modern, London; Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich; Galerie Thaddeus Ropac and Centre Pompidou, Paris; and finally at the newly opened Broad Art Museum, Los Angeles.

In addition to visiting important Beuys collections, I consulted numerous archives in Germany, most significantly the Joseph-Beuys-Archiv at the Museum Schloss Moyland and the Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels in Cologne, as well as the papers of curator Harald Szeemann and gallerist Alfred Schmela at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. Archival holdings on Beuys are severely limited by the demands placed by the Beuys Estate; the

Joseph-Beuys-Medien-Archiv at the Hamburger Bahnhof, for example, has been indefinitely closed to outside visitors, even scholars, though it promises rarely seen footage of Beuys. In an effort to compensate for lacunae in the archival record and discrepancies in the scholarly record, I conducted interviews with several of Beuys's associates, particularly René Block, Jörg Schellmann, Eugen Blume, Heiner Bastian, and Caroline Tisdall. They provided both key details that informed my arguments, as well as something less tangible: a fuller, not always sympathetic, but highly textured picture of who Beuys was as an artist, friend, teacher, mentor, boss, and co-conspirator.

My engagement with Beuys's objects, from extant fat pieces to political tracts stamped with party insignia, together with my attention to the way in which Beuys's work has been presented in artistic institutions, has led me to adopt a revised formalist methodology informed by the writing of literary theorist Caroline Levine. In her 2015 book *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network*, Levine attempts to bridge the formalist/historicist divide, persuasively articulating a new approach to analyzing form that illuminates its social relevance. Art historians delving into Levine's work must suspend discipline-specific understandings of "form," although as Levine points out, art history does not own the idea of form and in fact we have much to learn by thinking about form more expansively, as both a kind of material, or shape, and an idea (a duality that has been present in usages of "form" since the time of Plato and Aristotle). Levine broadly conceives of forms as abstract structuring mechanisms in literary texts as well as in "real life" social scenarios. Forms, as Levine sees them, have certain "affordances" (a term she borrows from design theory): a fork affords the ability to spear a piece of food, but it also affords a whisking motion and could even be used to pry something open. The form of the jail cell, a "whole" in Levine's lexicon, would seem to afford only enclosure and containment, but Levine

compellingly describes the various ways in which it can actually be quite porous, depending on its relationship with other wholes, such as the home, and with networks structured according to hierarchy, such as gangs or organized crime. Further, forms are transportable from one context to another, bringing some affordances with them, leaving others behind, and perhaps revealing new ones in the process.

Apart from describing the four categories of abstract form in the book's title and crafting illuminating examples that show what certain forms afford and how they intersect with one another, Levine importantly argues that we can apply what we learn about forms in texts to the forms that organize social life, and vice-versa, giving texts a new political agency. Levine rejects the notion that any given social condition can be used to explain the form of a literary text or cultural object (thereby treating the text/object, in the manner of Marxist critics, as "epiphenomenal"), and instead affirms the ability of a text itself to theorize "the social"—a complex interweaving of wholes, rhythms, hierarchies, and networks that is in constant development, with forms colliding and rearranging over time as they do in cultural objects.

Given Beuys's deep investments in questions of form and material alongside his explicit political concerns, as well as the movement in Beuys's work between "the social" and "the aesthetic," or between nonart and art contexts, the political powers of form Levine articulates are deeply relevant to my project. Considering that Beuys was limited in some ways and emboldened in others by his chosen forms and their intersections with artistic institutions and conventions, Levine's approach seems most appropriate for navigating Beuys's rhetoric and measuring it against the forms and effects of his projects. Although I do not rigorously apply Levine's terminology to the works I discuss in the dissertation, my overall analysis reflects Levine's insistence on the ability of form to structure experience (aesthetic and otherwise); on

the connections between form and power; and on the notion that temporal unfolding creates conditions for the rearrangement of forms—and for openness in general, even when a text (or a social condition) seems to insist on its totality or finality.

Levine further sees her project as complementary to a deconstructive approach, which I myself, out of the conviction that all cultural objects exceed mere intention, often employ to uncover latent meanings in a work of art. It would be an overstatement to claim that Beuys's oeuvre constitutes an "open work," to borrow Umberto Eco's formulation, and to reject authorial intention altogether, considering Beuys's propensity for elaborating his intentions at every turn. Following Levine, however, I offer that just as there are forms that structure Beuys's work—forms he intends and those he invokes unknowingly, forms that afford some things and foreclose others—there are nevertheless openings that reveal themselves *despite* Beuys's attempts to create a totalizing interpretive matrix for his work. The generative quality of Beuys's work offers one way to find such openings, as I hinted earlier in describing my desire to link my research on social sculpture to its contemporary extensions in social practice. The notion of engaging with a work through the lens of another artist developed from the early stages of my project, after I attended a talk delivered by my PhD supervisor, George Baker, in conjunction with the Beuys multiples exhibition at LACMA in 2009. Baker's lecture closely examined the psychoanalytic interplay between the work of Beuys and Paul Thek, who once smarted that Beuys's work needed "a woman's touch." The end of my third chapter in particular takes up this approach, finding in artists' reinterpretations of *7000 Oaks* some of its most compelling latent potential.

Chapter 1 maps the terrain of the neo-avant-garde and its insistence on the interpenetration of art and life, which set the stage for Beuys's development of the notion of

social sculpture and his importation of political forms into artistic contexts. I trace the origins of what I call Beuys's "aesthetic ideology," the belief system that underlies social sculpture, which relies on Romantic writing on aesthetic education, Anthroposophical social thought, and metaphors borrowed from fascist aesthetics. I propose, building on the arguments of Gene Ray, Thierry de Duve, and Jan Verwoert, that Beuys invokes these problematic threads of German intellectual and political history in order to confront them anew. The latter half of the chapter turns to Beuys's political action groups, beginning with the German Student Party, and analyzes Beuys's propensity for siting political projects in artistic contexts (*documenta* most prominent among them) and for producing art objects alongside conceptual or dialogic projects. I conclude the chapter by narrating Beuys's failure to achieve political success with the Green Party, which I attribute in part to his status as an artist—a situation that ultimately illuminates the persistent limitations of art to provide the basis for effective political speech. The forward-looking quality of Beuys's multiples, which are the subject of Chapter 2, and of Beuys's final project, *7000 Oaks*, which is discussed in Chapter 3, stem from Beuys's tacit acknowledgment of his own ineffectiveness in the present.

Chapter 2 illuminates the political work performed by Beuys's multiples. He engaged the medium beginning in 1965, just as multiples were becoming a transnational phenomenon embraced by a host of post-war artists interested in seriality, reproducibility, and deskilling, as well as by the prospect of putting their work in the hands of those who could not afford singular work. In the first section of this chapter, I narrate the emergence of the multiple in the late 1950s and analyze how the multiple was understood through the intersecting logics of the Duchampian readymade and the fine art print. I argue that multiples, unlike prints, embrace seriality, repetition, and reproducibility to the extent that such concerns inhere in multiples themselves,

radically fracturing the unity and totality of the work of art. The political work that most critics and historians attribute to the multiples pertains to their “democratizing” affordability, but I argue that while many artists avowed such utopian aspirations, in practice multiples fell short of creating new audiences and also failed, most significantly, to undermine the traditional value of uniqueness. The real political work that I understand the multiples to perform is the subject of the remainder of the chapter. I reject the assumption of uniformity across an edition and recuperate the affordance of multiples to engender difference, and I explore what results when variability is placed in direct tension with repeatability, especially in Beuys’s engagement with the rubber stamp and unstable materials. I argue that the dialectic of repetition and difference we can locate in the multiples functions as an analogy for reproducibility and aura, a key dynamic in Beuys’s oeuvre that maps further onto the tensions between individualism and collectivity that we see in Beuys’s social-sculpture work. I conclude by arguing that the tensions articulated in the multiples have consequences for Beuys’s self-construction as an author and also for the status of multiples as “vehicles of communication.”

The final chapter is a close study of Beuys’s final, monumental social sculpture, *7000 Eichen* (7000 Oaks), which spanned *documentas* 7 and 8 and remains in Kassel in perpetuity. I excavate the multilayered iconography and historical contexts of *7000 Oaks*, exposing the project’s ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning, which went largely unspoken in the 1980s and has continued to elude critics and historians. The project, I argue, was calibrated to call up the traumatic Nazi past, not only through the symbolism of the oak tree but also through the pile of basalt on Friedrichsplatz and its recollections of Zero Hour destruction and rebuilding. As a social sculpture, erected with contributions of money and labor from the community it would serve, *7000 Oaks* called upon the citizens of Kassel to transform historical trauma into a future-

oriented improvement to their own environment. I then skip forward in time, from 1987, the year of *7000 Oaks*' completion, to 2012, when numerous artists developed projects for *documenta 13* that reflected on the meaning and continued importance of *7000 Oaks* to the history of the exhibition and the landscape of the city. While scholarship on Beuys has often been limited by a belief that the meaning of his work is circumscribed by own interpretations, such persistent art-historical blind spots have not inhibited generations of younger artists from freshly approaching his work. I argue that the most compelling evidence of openness in Beuys's work—a feature I have consistently aimed to elucidate in this dissertation—has in fact been provided by *documenta* participants who have shown *7000 Oaks* to be literally and figuratively generative. This continuing provocation of imaginative creation is social sculpture at its fullest.

Social Sculpture, Aesthetic Ideology, and the Forms of Politics

“That’s the idea that people often laugh at me for.
Can sculpture change the world? Yes.”¹

In 1972, for the 100-day exhibition *documenta 5*, Joseph Beuys operated a project he called the *Büro für direkte Demokratie* (Office for Direct Democracy), which was sited in a gallery in *documenta*’s primary venue, the Museum Fridericianum, located in Kassel, Germany. Beuys’s office consisted mainly of a few tables, stacks of file boxes, a large blackboard on wheels, and piles of informational pamphlets, all from the office he had opened the year prior in Düsseldorf, down the street from Alfred Schmela’s well-known gallery. As I discuss in greater depth later in this chapter, the office provided the art-going public with information about Beuys’s political action group, which advocated direct democracy through referendum. The office also allowed Beuys the opportunity, alongside several close associates, to impress on *documenta* visitors the idea of “social sculpture”—the notion that everyday creative acts could better society—through real-time conversation. The office was thus also a social sculpture in and of itself, a microcosmic model of constantly shifting relations through dialogue, which modeled what ought to be possible outside of the museum walls.

Beuys had gained notoriety in the art world since his first *documenta* appearance in 1964, and wound up staging the closing event of *documenta 5*, the first iteration of the quinquennial exhibition to include *Aktionskunst*, performance art, and installation art alongside more

¹ Joseph Beuys, in archival footage of a roundtable discussion which likely occurred in the late 1970s or early 1980s, excerpted in the 2017 documentary *Beuys*, directed by Andreas Veiel. (The film has not yet been released on DVD; I was able to see it in the summer of 2017 in theaters in Germany, where it has been in wide release.)

traditional mediums of artistic production. In a gallery neighboring his Office for Direct Democracy, lined with posters by French Fluxus artist Ben Vautier, Beuys and his colleagues erected a makeshift boxing ring and put on a match.² Earlier that summer, a Kassel-based art student named Abraham David Christian had jokingly challenged Beuys to a fight, and Beuys harnessed the opportunity to do something outlandish and spectacular. In the match, Beuys represented “direct democracy through referendum,” the political system he had spent all summer advocating to *documenta* visitors, while Christian represented parliamentary democracy. The event was advertised with a postcard and a large poster that was pasted on the massive columns that flanked the entrance to the Museum Fridericianum. The poster, designed slapdash with the details of the match hand-written over photographs of the two artists, shows Christian clad in a black jacket and jeans, arms crossed, a cigarette dangling from his fingers, set against a slightly hunched, eerily wide-eyed Beuys dressed in his signature outfit: Stetson hat, fishing vest, jeans (Fig. 1.1). The generational gap between the two, which added to the humor of the match, was exaggerated by Christian’s art-student swagger and Beuys’s sobriety, perhaps calculated to level the field between Christian, who was showing at *documenta* for the first time, and Beuys, who was by then a towering figure in the European neo-avant-garde.

On October 8, 1972, at three o’clock in the afternoon, Beuys and Christian tossed aside their shirts, donned boxing gloves, and jumped into the ring. Michael Ruetz, a photojournalist on assignment from *Stern* magazine, captured the scene in a series of action shots showing Beuys glistening with sweat and suffering from a disheveled comb-over, surrounded by a robust, bemused audience as he deals hit after hit to Christian (Fig. 1.2). The match lasted three short rounds before Anatol Herzfeld, a student of Beuys acting as referee, declared Beuys the winner,

² Details of the boxing match are recounted in Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, 165; and Stüttgen, *Der ganze Riemen*, 981-982.

marking a symbolic victory for direct democracy and, in turn, a loss for the prevailing system of representative government.

The boxing match was a stunt—an elaborate joke that added levity to political discourse and fell in line with the Hippy carnival atmosphere generated by other projects at *documenta 5*, most notably Haus-Rucker-Co's inflatable PVC membrane, *Oase 7* [Oasis 7], which protruded from one of the second-story windows of the Museum Fridericianum like an alien appendage (Fig. 1.3). Far from being merely a joke, however, Beuys's boxing match presented an odd kind of symbolism to the public on the final afternoon of his 100-day social sculpture. The Office for Direct Democracy occupied a space in the museum for the express purpose of facilitating political debate over West Germany's system of government; besides advocacy of a specific proposal, the office was supposed to empower individuals to take seriously Beuys's pronouncement that "everyone is an artist," and to see themselves capable of creative acts that could push society as a whole towards conditions of greater equality and justice. On its face, the boxing match created a very different space, a closed ring in which two white men, both artists by profession, duked it out in front of spectators who were not invited to participate. The match was theatrical, even surreal, not entirely unlike the athletic Happenings that Claes Oldenburg had staged in New York a decade prior, or the Fluxus performances in which Beuys himself had participated.

The match's connection to Fluxus was highlighted by the match's constant backdrop of tongue-in-cheek, handwritten signs by Ben Vautier, which made statements such as "wegen der Kunst schlafe ich schlecht" ("because of art I sleep poorly") and "man muss alles sagen" ("one must say everything"). The raised platform on which the boxing ring was erected had also hosted a series of Vautier's concerts and performances, making it explicitly a space of real-time Fluxus

activity. (By this time, of course, Beuys had parted ways with most Fluxus practitioners, but was remembered by many for his Fluxus performances.) Finally, the boxing match, like many of the score-based works of the 1960s, which allowed for some elements of chance and participation but only within parameters dictated by the score (written by an artist), the boxing match had a pre-determined outcome. Beuys was clearly destined to win, a hollow victory that might have seemed like good fun but also reinforced his authorial position vis-à-vis his social-sculptural work. What kind of political discourse—or artistic practice—could such a match possibly model? What relationship between art and politics did it enact or envision?

The Office for Direct Democracy, and the boxing match appended to it, represent one of many instances in which Beuys imported the forms of bureaucratic politics into an artistic context, only to complicate that transferal in two ways: with performative spectacle, which left ambiguous the stakes of political discourse; and with rhetoric or material outcomes that served to reinforce Beuys's authority, mitigating the openness of the discourse upon which his work seemed to be predicated. This chapter explores the forms of bureaucratic politics Beuys employed, asking both what such forms afforded in theory and what effects they produced in practice. I argue that while we might expect seemingly dialogic projects such as the Office for Direct Democracy to disrupt Beuys's authorial control, the hierarchical arrangements native to bureaucratic organizations, when crossed with Beuys's status as an artist-author, instead often served to amplify his authority rather than challenge it.

In the first section of the chapter, I map the terrain of the neo-avant-garde and its insistence on the interpenetration of art and life, which set the stage for Beuys's development of the notion of social sculpture and his importation of political forms into artistic contexts. In the following section, I trace the origins of what I call Beuys's "aesthetic ideology," the belief

system that underlies social sculpture, which relies on Romantic writing on aesthetic education, Anthroposophical social thought, and metaphors borrowed from fascist aesthetics. I propose, building on the arguments of Gene Ray, Thierry de Duve, and Jan Verwoert, that Beuys invokes these problematic associations in order to confront them anew. The latter half of the chapter turns to Beuys's political action groups, beginning with the *Deutsche Studentenpartei* (German Student Party), and analyzes Beuys's propensity for siting political projects in artistic contexts (*documenta* most prominent among them) and for producing art objects alongside more conceptual or dialogic projects. I conclude the chapter by narrating Beuys's failure to achieve political success with the Green Party, which I attribute in part to his status as an artist. Though Beuys was limited by his involvement in the art world, however, it is indeed through the art objects he produced that he was able to extend his influence beyond his lifetime.

Art into Life

When Joseph Beuys first arrived at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie in 1961, he had already spent nearly a decade crafting sculpture from non-traditional materials, including asphalt and beeswax, in conjunction with wood and metal, and had begun using viscous organic materials such as animal fat and margarine. His investment in art as process deepened at the time of his first encounters with Fluxus performance around 1960, expanding the parameters of his art-making even further, from objects bound in space and time to art as *Aktion* or performance, as durational event subject to chance and accident in its unfolding. From there, Beuys grew his practice conceptually through an idea he called *soziale Plastik*, or social sculpture, which avowed that anyone wishing to change society for the better could do so through the simple exercise of creativity, which was not a capacity limited to society's professional artists. To make

the stakes of individual action clear, at the same time that he developed social sculpture Beuys also began importing bureaucratic, organizational political forms into artistic contexts, which allowed him to model, however tenuously, the society he envisioned.

The wildly heterogeneous transatlantic neo-avant-garde had, in many ways, cleared a path for Beuys's move toward social sculpture, and continued to evolve a context for his broadening approach to art as he was further developing it. By 1967, artists in Europe and the United States had largely rejected the modernist philosophy of *l'art pour l'art* and renounced ambitions toward aesthetic purity, autonomy, and medium-specificity. Across genres and movements, artists were opting instead to gesture towards everyday life and its attendant politics, even to the point that their work could scarcely be recognized as art. Situationism, Nouveau Réalisme, Neo-Dada, Pop, Arte Povera, Land Art or Earthworks, Conceptual Art, Fluxus, Happenings, and ZERO all participated—out of divergent motivations and towards radically distinct ends—in a rhetoric that embraced the interpenetration of art and life. In spite of its seeming hard-edged formalism, minimalism, too, through the encounters it staged between sculpture and spectator, compounded the damage done elsewhere to the notion of art's autonomy and freedom from context.³ The key thematics of the neo-avant-garde echoed the broader cultural moment, in which music and dance alongside visual art were concerned with the real, the everyday, spectacle, intermediality, and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art, interests greatly fueled by the post-war rediscovery and restaging of the pre-war avant-gardes, including Dada, Surrealism, Russian Constructivism, and the Bauhaus. Across aesthetic tendencies, time and process pervaded artistic practice, becoming, in a sense, artistic materials or modes in such a

³ Though critics disagreed over the aesthetic implications of minimalism's "theatricality," to use Michael Fried's pejorative, the fact that minimal sculpture created phenomenological experiences—and even actualized such interactions with the human form through their use as props for performance—was a point of concurrence across critical responses.

way that they seemed to overpower the historical emphasis on the concrete, static art object.⁴

Critics Lucy Lippard and John Chandler coined the term “dematerialization” in 1967 to diagnosis this phenomenon, which they, and many others, understood to represent a major shift in the history of art, although the turn away from objects proved only partial, as we shall see in the case of Beuys.⁵

It is worth pausing here to note that the rhetoric of art merging with life presupposed that they were two separate things—that they were two distinct “spheres” of activity that had been kept apart and needed to be brought together. There is some truth to that formulation, in the sense that many foremost critics, especially in the immediate post-war period, advocated that art’s power came from its autonomy, its ability to offer a different form of experience than that encountered in daily life; it was through new forms of experience and opportunities for aesthetic contemplation that art could, in fact, do political work. The neo-avant-garde, taking its cues from the historical avant-garde, located art’s political work not in its remove from daily life, but in its ability to assimilate everyday life, to reflect it back and make it unfamiliar. When I write later in this chapter of the “aestheticization of politics” and its corollary, the “politicization of art,” we should recall that, from the perspective of both Greenbergian modernists and neo-avant-garde practitioners, some of whom were borrowing forms of political protest and using their work to effect explicit political statements, all art does political work. The historical debates on this issue

⁴ Natilee Harren discusses this phenomenon at length in “Objects Without Object: The Artwork in Flux, 1958-1969,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013), 40.

⁵ Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object* (New York: Praeger, 1973). I would argue that these claims were overstated, as most artists close to Lippard continued making objects despite their emphasis on ideation independent of the creation of material things. The concept of dematerialization has, however, become an incredibly influential force in the rhetoric and theorization of art since the 1970s, from the development of institutional critique to the many manifestations of what has been called social practice, participatory art, relational aesthetics, etc., which rely on human interaction as their primary artistic “material.” I address the shortcomings of dematerialization as a periodizing concept in chapter 2, and social sculpture as a precedent for contemporary practices in the epilogue.

have had less to do with whether art is *allowed* to be political, but rather with how art *goes about* being political. Abstract Expressionism's decline in the 1960s coincided with escalating social tensions in the United States and Europe and with a war—to younger artists who felt the political urgency of the situation, it no longer seemed like enough to offer an optical experience that affirmed man's subjectivity and humanity. Political urgency had to invigorate the work itself, in a way that abstract painting simply could not, and the notion of merging art with life became shorthand for the operation by which that invigoration might happen.

With few exceptions, virtually every neo-avant-garde tendency found its place in the programs of West German galleries, as well as at *documenta*, and at the Kölner Kunstmarkt, the world's first modern and contemporary art fair founded in 1967 by Hein Stünke (owner of Cologne's Galerie Der Spiegel, which sold unique works and multiples) and Rudolf Zwirner, Stünke's mentee, who had opened a gallery in Essen in 1959 and moved it to Cologne in 1962.⁶ The marketing poster for the inaugural Kunstmarkt, pointedly designed by American Pop artist Robert Indiana, telegraphed the message that, rather than perversely monetizing contemporary artistic practices, the fair was merely responding to the embrace, among artists themselves, of commerce and the commodity, making such a fair the natural consequence of the international art it was promoting (Fig. 1.4). Pop was just one strain of 60s artistic production that found an audience at the fair, which sponsored booths that sold a wide variety of artwork, including objects by artists who did not so obviously revel in sales culture. (Zwirner, for his part, had hosted conceptual and performance projects at his gallery, including Beuys's first *Aktion* using fat in 1963.)

⁶ Preceded in 1966 by Stünke and Zwirner's cofounding of the *Verein progressiver deutscher Kunsthändler* (Association of Progressive German Art Dealers), the Kölner Kunstmarkt inspired the creation of a number of fairs that have superseded it in importance, including Art Basel, established in 1970, followed by the Foire Internationale d'Art Contemporain, better known as FIAC, founded in Paris in 1973.

As he was coming into his own as an artist, Beuys encountered strategies as diverse as Arman's Nouveau Réaliste *poubelles*, first shown at Düsseldorf's Galerie Schmela in the summer of 1960 (just a few months before they debuted at Iris Clert's gallery in Paris), and the ZERO group's light ballets, street actions, kinetic sculptures, and collaboratively produced magazines, all of which were staged in West Germany between 1957 and 1966 by Heinz Mack, Otto Piene, Günther Uecker, and a host of guests, including Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni. Political urgency—the desire for art to have something to say about everyday life or some obvious relation to it—thus emerged in various forms, from Arman's revised version of the readymade, specifically coded with the aesthetics of the street (and Europe's "Zero Hour", which left city streets heaped with rubble), to ZERO's spectacular events, which temporarily transformed public spaces into stages for the sublime.

The encounters that were undoubtedly the most transformative for Beuys, however, were those he had with Fluxus, just as he was moving ever more towards what he called an "expanded notion of art." Initially an argument for re-joining art and science, the expanded notion came to be a shorthand for creativity, broadly, as the basis of art-making, and more importantly, the basis for social transformation when exercised in every sphere of life. What was expanding for Beuys was not necessarily the gestures or materials that could count as art (he had already been using non-traditional materials such as fat and beeswax for some time), but rather the relevance of art to society. The expanded notion of art took on new flavor in the wake of Beuys's engagements with Fluxus between 1962 and 1964, following his introduction to Nam June Paik and subsequently to George Maciunas. Without knowing much about Beuys, who had been appointed professor at the Kunstakademie but had not yet had any major exhibitions of his work, Maciunas took him up on an offer to help organize a Fluxus concert at the Kunstakademie.

Beuys initially shied from participating as a performer, but had found his nerve by the time he helped Maciunas and others stage the Festum-Fluxorum-Fluxus at the Kunstakademie in February 1963. Beuys's performance, *Siberische Symphonie* (Siberian Symphony), replete with narrative and mystical allusions, came as a shock to his Fluxus acquaintances, who had little forewarning that Beuys's work would diverge so radically from their own (Fig. 1.5). Beuys recalled, "That was my first public Fluxus action. My very first. I can still clearly remember how totally surprised Dick Higgins looked; he had understood that this action had absolutely nothing to do with a Dadaistic concept. I believe he had perceived that it concerned itself with something possessing a totally different point of value."⁷ Beuys was not interested in the generalized politics of staging minor everyday activities and objects in order to demonstrate the arbitrariness of art as a defined sphere or the uncanniness of the quotidian; rather, he was interested in investing everyday stuff with spiritual meaning and purposing it as an element in his evolving conception of art's relevance to social reorganization. To be fair, to the casual viewer, Beuys's use of fat and sausages and hardened beeswax, among other household items, strongly resembled the use of familiar things in Fluxus, but both parties understood their respective engagements with the everyday to be fundamentally different.

Beuys was also disinterested in the anti-individualism and anti-egoism Maciunas and others espoused.⁸ Whereas many Fluxus performances occurred simultaneously or bled one into the other over the course of a festival, Beuys took pains to clean up the stage before he began, wiping away the residue of previous scores in order to distinguish his own performance—

⁷ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 92.

⁸ Maciunas, of course, did not always practice what he preached. He was known for being controlling and authoritative, demanding, for instance, that artists who participated in Fluxus had to agree to conduct all future business through Fluxus. What looked like a radical group of artists from the outside was in fact, at times, a highly bureaucratic arrangement, with Maciunas at the top of the hierarchy.

temporally, materially, and conceptually—as a distinct work.⁹ For Beuys, working together did not mean true collaboration; his own agenda, which had a much stronger narrative and personal focus than Fluxus allowed, supplanted his desire to maintain a formal relationship with Fluxus as a framework for art-making, particularly as Beuys was already being courted by a number of gallerists and had his position and studio at the Kunstakademie as reliable platforms.¹⁰

Fluxus turned Beuys on to performance, but it also encouraged him to direct his work toward the social—though not in the way that Maciunas would have advocated. Maciunas outlined his conception of Fluxus’ social role in a letter to Tomas Schmidt in 1962: “Fluxus’ goals are social (not esthetic). They (ideologically)... are set up like this: Step by step elimination of the fine arts (music, drama, poetry, prose, painting, sculpture, etc., etc.). This motivates the desire to direct wasted material and human capabilities toward socially constructive goals such as the applied arts...”¹¹ Fluxus wanted to be violently subsumed by the social by slowly destroying the fine arts and their claim to particular importance or prestige. Beuys, too, wanted to undermine art’s exclusivity, but by universalizing it rather than dissolving it. He believed the social goal of art to be the application of art’s fundamental principle—the exercise of creativity and individual freedom—to society as a whole, a rather different

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ In “Joseph Beuys: Echoes in America,” Joan Rothfuss describes George Maciunas’s strong dislike of Beuys’s work and reproduces the text of a letter from Beuys to Maciunas in which Beuys asks Maciunas to look past their ideological differences to establish some common ground and maintain their networks of connection. There is no record of a response in the Joseph-Beuys-Archiv, though Beuys did participate in a memorial concert for Maciunas organized by Galerie René Block and held at the Kunstakademie in 1978 (several months after Beuys finally won a nearly six-year-long legal battle to resume his teaching position). *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (New York: D.A.P. in association with The John and Maple Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), 37-53.

¹¹ Qtd. in Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, 82. Beuys also claimed to concur with Fluxus’s rejection of the art object (what Beuys referred to as the “end product”) as a “useless piece of merchandise,” to quote Maciunas, though Fluxus artists continued to make objects and Beuys himself avowed the importance of objects, as I discuss later in this chapter.

conception of the role of art in social change. Beuys himself recognized that he did not share Fluxus's aims, concluding for his own purposes that "the political dimension [in Fluxus] was very limited."¹² In the end, it seems that Fluxus served to push Beuys to politicize his expanded notion, perhaps as an acknowledgement that Fluxus, too, was operating under an expanded concept of art-making, but not the one he himself wanted to advance.

Though Beuys derided Fluxus as "Neo-Dadaist," by which he meant interested in provocation for its own ends,¹³ in his desire to explode the limit-conditions of art he was equally indebted to the historical precedent of Dada, particularly the innovations and interventions of Marcel Duchamp. Beuys's desire to exceed the demarcated parameters of artistic production and reception through an expanded notion of art derives, in part, from the gesture of Duchamp's readymades, though Beuys's activity differed in tone and consequence. As Thierry de Duve has argued, Duchamp's readymades articulated a general theory of art, whereby anything can become art so long as an artist declares it to be so—and also places it in a context that alters our relation to it and sets it apart from its everyday equivalents.¹⁴ By purchasing a urinal, rotating it, signing it with a fake name, and elevating it to the status of sculpture in the context of an independent art show, Duchamp mocked the long-standing myth of artistic genius; exposed the false authority of the signature (or elevated it, depending on how one understands *Fountain*); and made visible the transformative quality of the exhibition context, which can turn a manufactured good into an art object by changing its conditions of reception and nullifying its use value. (Or at

¹² Qtd. in Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, 86. Critics of Beuys have long intimated that he was shunned, to his dismay, from Fluxus circles, which they cite as evidence that he was fundamentally naïve and out of touch with the neo-avant-garde.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Thierry de Duve, *Kant After Duchamp* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).

least that was the intention, though the rejection and destruction of *Fountain* demonstrates that not all parties agreed the urinal had superseded its base function or vulgar commodity status—and those who maintain that the urinal was truly just a crude joke would argue that it was not supposed to.) As Hal Foster put it, Dada “define[d] the institution of art in an epistemological inquiry into its aesthetic categories and/or destroy[ed] it in an anarchistic attack on its formal conventions.”¹⁵

Beuys’s approach, which replaced Duchamp’s biting wit and irony with deep sincerity, was meant to expand the accepted limitations of the categories of “author/artist” and “work of art,” and to deconstruct and deregulate the rhetoric of the context of art so that everyday activities could be understood as acts of “art-making.” While Duchamp’s urinal immediately clarified the artificiality of art’s constructs (and should have spelled its complete demise as a separate sphere of activity, though it has inspired instead a century’s worth of ironic aesthetic gestures), Beuys’s expanded notion of art recast art as the general exercise of creativity or imagination, towards ends that may include but are not limited to aesthetic objects. Beuys did not expose the context of art as constructed and false, but rather exalted art as a mode of thought that should be emulated in *all* activities. Therein lies Beuys’s disdain for Duchamp’s recusal from art-making, which the former immortalized in the irreverent 1964 performance *Das Schweigen des Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet* (The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated), during which he painted that phrase on a poster, smeared it with chocolate, and then constructed a free-standing fat corner inside of a short wooden fence (Fig. 1.6). Beuys’s disavowal of Duchamp’s “silence,” by which he meant lack of aesthetico-political commitment,¹⁶ was magnified by the

¹⁵ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 4.

fact that the performance was broadcast live on television—not only was he taking Duchamp to task for recusing himself from the art world and from social responsibility, he was extending that message far and wide.

I would argue, however, that Beuys's performance was less a disavowal than a distancing. In declaring Duchamp's silence overrated, Beuys was not refusing to acknowledge Duchamp as an important precedent for his own work, as a number of scholars have argued,¹⁷ but was instead trying to effect a shift in Duchamp's legacy in a direction that reclaimed art's centrality to social change, bridging the philosophical Dadaism of Paris and New York with the socially critical Dadaism of Berlin and Zurich. Beuys made his relationship to Duchamp clear in two interviews: "I criticize him [Duchamp] because at the very moment when he could have developed a theory on the basis of the work he had accomplished, he kept silent. And I am the one who, today, develops the theory he could have developed." Several years earlier, Beuys had specified, "[Duchamp] entered this object [the urinal] into the museum and noticed that its transportation from one place to another made it into art. But he failed to draw the clear and simple conclusion that every human being is an artist."¹⁸ Although one might not agree with Beuys's assessment of Duchamp's maneuvers (and Beuys is inaccurate, as Thierry de Duve points out, in his claim that Duchamp entered the urinal "into the museum"), he nevertheless clearly believed himself the

¹⁶ Moira Roth, in an essay for *Artforum* in 1977, took Duchamp's silence, aligned with that of John Cage, as the basis for what she called the "Aesthetic of Indifference," a cool, ironic posture she saw extended in the work of Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and George Segal, among others, whose coolness was all the more notable for being born in a time of political extremes that would push others, by the 1960s, to develop politically committed work in response. "The Aesthetic of Indifference," *Artforum* 16, no. 3 (November 1977): 46-51.

¹⁷ Benjamin Buchloh, "Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol," *Artforum* (January 1980): 35-40.

¹⁸ Both quotes appear, translated into English from French, in Thierry de Duve, "Don't Shoot the Messenger," *Artforum* 52, no. 3 (November 2013). The first quote was originally published in "Interview with Bernard Lamarche-Vadel," *Canal* 58/59 (Winter 1984/85): 7. The second quote comes from "Interview with Irmeline Lebeer," *Cahiers du Musée national d'art moderne* 4 (1980): 176.

inheritor of certain Duchampian innovations, and understood his belief that everyone is an artist to be the natural conclusion of Duchamp's work, which Duchamp himself had resisted.

To get at Beuys's interest in the artist's more expansive social role, we have to turn from the legacy of Duchamp to the legacy of Russian Constructivism, which envisioned art not in the museum, but in the streets, as an integral participant in the creation of a utopian future. Beuys was likely only aware of Constructivism through its partial inheritance in the philosophy of the Bauhaus, though it had also returned to some degree through Maciunas's writings.¹⁹ In the wake of the Russian Revolution of 1917, Constructivists adapted a formal language they had already begun to evolve into the basis of an approach to style and material "within a certain conception of their potential as active participants in the process of social and political transformation"—namely the establishment of a revolutionary state ruled by the ideology of Marxist materialism.²⁰ In service of their new state, Constructivists played a key role in administering arts organizations (which handled government commissions and state-sponsored workshops of applied arts, acquired work for museums, and mounted exhibitions); decorated city streets for revolutionary festivals; and executed a broad range of agit-prop tasks, including those related to Lenin's "Plan for Monumental Propaganda" (for which Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International* was

¹⁹ Christine Lodder dedicates the final chapter of her comprehensive text *Russian Constructivism* to detailing the limited reception the Constructivists enjoyed in the West (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 225-238. While it is unclear what interest Beuys might have had in either Constructivism itself or its influence on the Bauhaus, Maciunas's 1962 Fluxus manifesto and a number of his letters from the early 1960s strongly echo certain Constructivist ideas, including the rejection of art as a separate, elevated sphere of production, and the call to take up work in the factory, to make useful things rather than indulgent, autonomous artworks; Maciunas even explicitly names the 1920s Soviet group LEF as an inspiration for Fluxus. The superficiality of Maciunas's interest in the Russian avant-garde, however, is convincingly articulated in Cuauhtémoc Medina, "The 'Kulturbolschewiken' II," *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics* 49/50 (Spring/Autumn 2006): 231-242.

²⁰ Lodder, *Russian Constructivism*, 1. This is, admittedly, a simple gloss of Lodder's rich and detailed study, which illuminates internal debates and ways in which the formal language of Constructivism was not always a neat match for the ideology it intended to serve. My goal here and in the following paragraphs is merely to indicate how Constructivism's conjoining of art and politics offered a singular precedent for how politicized art might construct a new society.

created). Most Constructivists saw themselves as part of a “brotherhood of artists and architects” whose responsibility was “to link art with life,”²¹ which meant more specifically merging art with technology and craft in order to create an art that would indeed be an essential tool not just in serving the state, but in actively constituting its future utopia.

Beuys’s turn to political tools was markedly different, both in terms of his historical context and his stated aims. He was not operating within a network of artists working towards a common goal, though he did try to tie himself loosely to the student movement at the beginning, and to the Greens at the end, only to find that his message was not seen as commensurable with either. More importantly, he was developing an aesthetic ideology aimed not at bringing to fulfillment what already existed in elemental form (a collectivist culture, for the Constructivists), rather he was advocating for the rejection both of a particular kind of government (representative democracy) and of the primary corrupting features of Western society: its relegation of creativity to what it deemed a separate aesthetic sphere, and its general worship of rationality and capital over creativity. His goal was not to create art that would be a tool in serving the state, but rather an art—which he called social sculpture—that would act as a metaphor or model for the better future he envisioned. In what follows, I demonstrate the extent to which social sculpture derived from various strains of aesthetic ideology, a lineage that is no doubt problematic, but that might also offer the possibility of understanding Beuys’s work as coming to terms with the fascist past. By dint of that historical inheritance, Beuys’s work is necessarily backwards-looking, but it is also, I go on to argue, oriented towards the future, even while it engages political forms that seem to encourage dialogue and action in the here and now.

²¹ Anatoly Lunacharsky (the first Soviet minister of education), quoted in *ibid.*, 59.

The Aesthetic Ideology of Social Sculpture

While Beuys's political turn was in sync with contemporaneous developments in the field of art, he articulated his program in ways that were, to some degree, singular to his practice, but that also invoked longer histories of revolutionary art-making and rhetoric, much of which had been tainted by its association with fascism. Several interrelated principles, which I have already mentioned, have become indelibly linked to his persona: the *erweiterte Kunstbegriff*, or expanded notion of art; the aphorism "*Jeder Mensch ein Künstler*," or "Everyone is an artist"; and the totalizing concept of *soziale Plastik*, or social sculpture. The genealogy of these three interrelated concepts is difficult to chart with precision. We can pinpoint the first time that "*Jeder Mensch ein Künstler*" appeared in print, for example, but not when Beuys might have introduced the phrase in his personal notes or in his classroom at the Kunstakademie.²² From what can be confidently reconstructed, it seems that he conceived the expanded notion of art at the time that he turned to non-traditional materials in the 1950s. Initially, the expanded notion nodded to Beuys's desire to conjoin art and science, bringing together the two interests that occupied him most fully in his early adult life. "Through consideration and analysis I came to the knowledge that the concepts of art and science in the development of thought in the western world were diametrically opposed," Beuys offered, "and that on the basis of these facts a solution to this polarization in conceptions must be sought, and that expanded views must be formed."²³ Presaging his conception of a totalizing art, however, Beuys's proposal for bringing together the poles of art and science does not envision the two fields co-existing harmoniously, but rather

²² According to Carmen Alonso, the phrase "*Jeder Mensch ein Künstler*" appeared for the first time in print as the title of a telephone interview with Beuys published in a Cologne newspaper in June 1968, roughly a year after the founding of the German Student Party. See Ackerman and Malz, eds., *Joseph Beuys: Parallel Prozessen*, 191.

²³ Qtd. in Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas, 65-66.

subjugates science to art, as science was once subjugated to religion. “...Everything, both human and scientific, stems from art,” Beuys proclaimed. “In this totally primary concept of art everything is brought together, one comes to the conclusion that the scientific was originally contained in the artistic.”²⁴ According to Beuys, what has divorced art from science—and since the Enlightenment elevated science above art in social importance and authority—is the assumption that they are impulses derived from divergent modes of thought, one superior to the other. Beuys’s expanded notion, at its core, is a desire to overcome the gulf between “tendencies of thought which are separated because they spring from reason [science] or intuition [art].”²⁵

To further convey the opening up of the terms “art” and “artist,” Beuys turned to the Jena Romantics, transforming an aphorism coined by the eighteenth-century poet-philosopher Novalis (the pseudonym of Georg Philipp Friedrich Freiherr von Hardenberg) into a catchphrase that could encapsulate his view that art was the exercise of creativity towards socially productive ends. Novalis, in the 1798 text *Faith and Love or the King and the Queen*, writes, “A true prince is the artist of all artists, that is to say the one who leads artists. Every man should be an artist. Everything can become a fine art.”²⁶ Novalis understood spirituality and aesthetic contemplation as interconnected routes to individual freedom, as did his contemporary Friedrich Schiller.²⁷ Schiller, however, believed art must rise above the “neediness” of daily life, and equated the freedom that attains to the realm of art with art’s ability to be directed instead by “the necessity

²⁴ Qtd. in *ibid.*, 66.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

²⁶ Qtd. in Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany* [1996], trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).

²⁷ The idea that artists could be the initiators of social change was also not specific to the Germans; in the early nineteenth century, French reformer Claude Henri de Rouvroy, Comte de Saint-Simon, known as Saint-Simon, argued in his 1825 tract “The artist, the savant, and the industrialist”—using for the first time the term “avant-garde”—that art could serve an emancipatory function.

in our minds,” which bends toward beauty.²⁸ While Schiller claimed that art’s “rules” should not be born of contemporary matters, he believed that its purpose was indeed social betterment. “I hope to convince you,” he told his readers, that “this matter [of art] is far less alien to the needs of the age than it is to taste; and that if one is to resolve this political problem one must in practice take the aesthetic path, for it is by way of beauty that one approaches liberty.”²⁹

Beuys merged the philosophies of Schiller and Novalis, radicalizing the Romantics’ elevation of aesthetic education. Literalizing Novalis’s characterization of the true prince as the “artist of all artists,” his rhetorical proclamation that “every man should be an artist,” and his claim that “everything can be a fine art,” Beuys inflated such rhetoric from the level of analogy to become the conceptual groundwork for a vision of society as a work of art. Whereas Schiller believed aesthetic education could elevate man above the troubles of society (and thereby eventually change society itself), Beuys claimed that art, expansively cast as creativity, was in fact the direct means of society’s improvement. Historically relegated to the narrow province of artists, creativity, Beuys argued, was the key to individual freedom, which was in turn the necessary condition for breaking apart the ingrained repressive structures of post-war society. When embraced as a guiding principle by citizens of all professions, creativity—which also goes by the names “imagination” and “intuition” in Beuys’s work—could be a revolutionary force, slowly healing the wounds of corruption and oppression wrought by the reign of Enlightenment rationalism and its inevitable offspring, capitalism, which is cast as the ultimate embodiment of

²⁸ In the second letter of his 1795 *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*, Schiller writes, “The course of events has lent the spirit of the age a direction that threatens to render the art of the ideal ever more remote from this spirit. This art has to leave the realm of reality, and with proper audacity elevate itself above simple need; for art is a daughter of freedom, responding not to the demands of matter, but to the necessity in our minds.” Trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Penguin Classics, 2016), 5.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

individual liberty.³⁰ In an act of *détournement*, Beuys's framework twists the notion of individual freedom away from rational self-interest and towards the social, paradoxically lauding the cultivation of individual freedom for its ability to contribute to social good. (Capitalism no doubt also claims social benefit, but also accepts ills—poverty, environmental devastation, war, etc.—as unfortunate but necessary consequences of an economic system that values liberty over community.) As Beuys explained during the 1971 Aktion *Kunst = Mensch* (Art = Man): “Art equals man equals creativity equals freedom. Every man is creative, and hence he is free. Freedom and creativity make him fundamentally able to determine, to form, and to change. This is true both in the realm of art—whose task is to create awareness of such possibilities—and in society.”³¹ For those who recognized in Beuys's formulation the seeds of Romantic thought, it must have appeared as though Beuys was reviving the forgotten, but not impotent, promise of an earlier episode in German intellectual history.

The Jena Romantics, Schiller in particular, linked freedom, creativity, and social change in response to their disillusionment with Enlightenment thought. Beuys's access to Romantic aesthetic ideology was in part through primary sources,³² but his understanding of the promise of creativity as an expression of individual freedom was most affected by his extensive reading of the fin-de-siècle writings of Rudolf Steiner. Born in 1861 under the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Steiner studied math, natural sciences, and Kantian philosophy. From 1882 to 1897, he helped

³⁰ In Beuys's appearance on the Austrian “Club 2” talk show in 1983, he specifically tried to distinguish his own use of the word creativity from common parlance, where it is merely a meaningless “modisches Wort” (trendy word). To him creativity means the development of man's inner abilities, namely his capacities for emotion, feeling, and will. *Club 2*, “Kunst oder Schwindel?” (Art or Fraud?) ORF, January 27, 1983, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6pS7H_24CE.

³¹ Qtd. in Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, 240-241. *Kunst = Mensch* was performed on December 15, 1971, at the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum in Krefeld.

³² Beuys's early biographers report that Beuys read Schiller, Goethe, Hölderin, and Novalis, alongside Kierkegaard and Scandinavian literature, between 1933 and 1940. Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, 13.

publish Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's scientific writings, completed a dissertation on Goethe, and had a transformative encounter with the writings and person of Friedrich Nietzsche. He found himself at the turn of the century deeply involved with the German chapter of the Theosophical Society, a group formed around an esoteric mystical philosophy born in New York in 1875, which sought to uncover a path to enlightenment through engagement with nature's mysteries and the secrets of the ancient past. Steiner lectured on Theosophy across Europe, slowly replacing its spiritual-scientific terms with his own, ultimately leading him to break off from the Theosophists to form a competing group called the Anthroposophical Society, which set up its headquarters in Switzerland in a building he named the Goetheanum. After World War I, Steiner's activities expanded, leading to the establishment of the first Waldorf school (a form of alternative childhood education that spread internationally and remains active today) and what Steiner called the School for Spiritual Science, the research arm of the Anthroposophical Society that carried out initiatives to study education, medicine, science, and performing, literary, and visual arts.

Beuys became intensely engaged with Steiner's writings in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and Beuys's work bears out his fascination with numerous ideas that align with—or come directly from—Steiner's program: a belief in the occult and in the mysteries of nature as paths toward knowledge (with perhaps greater authority than empirical science); an investment in the healing potentials of alchemy and homeopathy; and an unrelenting drive to communicate knowledge—and its power for social change—through teaching. While it is unnecessary to rehearse here the catalogue of references to Steiner that one finds peppered throughout Beuys's oeuvre, Beuys claimed Steiner's notion of the *Dreigliederung des sozialen Organismus*, or the threefold social order, as one of the primary sources of his own aesthetic ideology, in particular

his vision of the ideal society and his understanding of the role of the teacher and artist in fulfilling that vision. The calamitous end of World War I led Steiner to develop a prescription for social organization based on the idea that society ought to be comprised of three distinct spheres, namely the economic sphere (*Wirtschaftsleben*), the legal or human rights sphere (*Rechtsleben*), and the cultural sphere (*Geistesleben*). Likening society to a bodily organism, Steiner advocated that the three remain separate but cooperative; towards that end, he outlined specific principles by which each should be guided in order to keep society in balance and bend self-interest toward social betterment. Economics ought to be directed by a duty towards brotherhood (*die Brüderlichkeit dem Wirtschaftsleben*), the legal sphere must be dedicated to equality (*die Gleichheit dem Rechtsleben*), and culture is responsible for the cultivation of human capabilities, which requires that cultural producers be granted the freedom to conduct themselves as they wish, without interference from the other spheres (*Freiheit dem Geistesleben*). Beuys took up Steiner's notion that the cultural sphere ought to cultivate human capabilities, which Beuys understood, following Romantic and Anthroposophical thought, to be creativity and individual freedom, both of which he believed were essential to attaining a transcendent spirituality. The expanded notion of art and the idea that everyone is an artist thus became codified under the rubric of what Beuys called social sculpture, which conceptualized society as a sculpture-in-becoming, shaped through the actions of its artist-citizens. Beuys thus took Steiner's notion of culture as one of three aspects of a harmonious society and proposed further that the cultural sphere ought to provide the aesthetic metaphor under which the other spheres should operate. In other words, if creativity were considered the basis for all human activities, and not just those deemed "art," it could aid in improving society's ills. Beuys thus advocated the concept of "sculpture as all-embracing... as developing consciousness that results from the

intention, the basis of every form of creativity, that is, from certain forces of the free imagination...”³³

As a major source of Beuys’s aesthetic ideology, Steiner has been especially problematic. He was considered by many in the post-war period to be more of a cult figure than a philosopher, and his entreaties toward homeopathy, mysticism, and other forms of spiritual engagement outside the mainstream were judged to be nonsense.³⁴ Most damaging, however, have been Steiner’s connections with Nazi ideology. Some have argued that race theory in Steiner’s writings supported the notion of racial hierarchies and the desire for racial purity, ultimately helping, alongside other so-called “race science,” to justify Nazi eugenics programs. There remains wide disagreement as to how Steiner’s writings on race ought to be interpreted and whether they had significant ties to Nazism. Anthroposophists commenting on that relationship today have argued that Steiner was in fact persecuted by the Nazis: he was accused of having strong alliances with Jews, and the Anthroposophical Society was banned in Germany in 1935 in part for “its opposition to the National Socialistic idea of Volk (*Voelkische Gedanke*).”³⁵ The fact that Waldorf schools were subsequently shut down offers more evidence, according to Anthroposophists, that their philosophy was deemed incompatible with Nazism and therefore hardly responsible for it. Because Anthroposophists believe Steiner’s philosophy, and the society

³³ Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, 93.

³⁴ In an interview with curator Ann Temkin, Beuys collector Reiner Speck, a physician by trade, notes the general disdain for Steiner and Anthroposophy that prevailed in the post-war period, but adds that Beuys’s invocations of Steiner were also not helpful to the philosopher’s reputation, as Beuys seemed to fuel misunderstandings rather than clarify them. He is equally eager to point out, however, that he came to believe a great many scientific and medical theories proposed by Beuys and Steiner, making it unfortunate that neither were taken as seriously as they should have been. In *Joseph Beuys: Jeder Griff muß sitzen – Just Hit the Mark* (London and New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2003), 16.

³⁵ Memorandum of the Prussian Secret Police, Berlin, November 1, 1935, quoted in Uwe Werner, *Anthroposophen in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Verlag R. Oldenberg, Muenchen, 1999), my translation.

itself, was largely antithetical to Nazi thought, there has been little attempt to reconcile Anthroposophy with the legacy of Nazism despite the fact that many outside of the society are troubled by connections between the two. In the late 1990s, one Anthroposophist went so far as to write, “Because it was known on the whole that few Anthroposophists fell for National Socialism, ‘coming to terms with the past’ was not an issue,” as if to imply that adherents of Steiner’s work were somehow exempt from the overall German responsibility of making sense of the Holocaust.³⁶

In attempting to understand and assess Beuys’s appropriation of Steiner as a central facet of his aesthetic ideology, we would be hard-pressed to find specific evidence that Beuys wrestled with any connections between Steiner and Nazism, though he must have known that many Germans believed Anthroposophy to be implicated in Nazi ideology and race science. Beuys’s work has been vigorously condemned by a number of writers, particularly in the last decade, who believe Anthroposophy to have been inalterably tainted by Nazism, a fact compounded in an assessment of Beuys’s work by the facts of his own voluntary military service.

Indeed, for Beuys, the shadow of fascism extends far beyond his engagement with Steiner. The very notion of the “aestheticization of politics” is bound up, perhaps inextricably, with its applications under fascism, as is the notion of the “politicization of art.” Beuys’s specific language, namely the characterization of society as a sculptural form-in-becoming, derives in part from his work as a sculptor, but it also relates strongly to fascist rhetoric. Joseph Goebbels, the rhetorician and propagandist of the Third Reich, wrote in his prescient 1929 novel *Michael*:

³⁶ “Da man insgesamt wußte, daß nur wenige Anthroposophen dem Nationalsozialismus verfallen waren, war die ‘Vergangenheitsbewältigung’ kein Thema,” my translation. Werner, *Anthroposophen in der Zeit*, 364. At the time that Werner wrote this text on Anthroposophy and Nazism, Werner was serving as the head archivist at the Dornach Goetheanum, and so the overall claims made must be understood as part of a larger attempt by contemporary adherents of Anthroposophy to combat charges of racism in their teachings.

A German Destiny in Diary Form, “A statesman is also an artist. For him, the people is merely what stone is for a sculptor. The Führer with the masses poses no more of a problem than does a painter with color.”³⁷ He echoed those sentiments in his 1931 book *Fight for Berlin*, writing, “For us the masses are simply a shapeless material. Only under the hand of an artist can a people be shaped from the masses, and a nation from the people.”³⁸ Eric Michaud has catalogued numerous citations from speeches and written texts, appearing before and during the rise of European fascism, that borrow artistic language, and many of them specifically characterize the polity as sculptural material or form-in-process. Benito Mussolini pronounced himself “an artist among artists, for a politician works above all with the hardest and most difficult of all materials, man.”³⁹ Elsewhere, he extended the metaphor, admitting that “when the masses are like wax in my hands, or when I mingle with them and am almost crushed by them, I feel myself to be a part of them. All the same there persists in me a certain feeling of aversion, like that which the modeler feels for the clay he is molding. Does not the sculptor sometimes smash his block of marble into fragments because he cannot shape it into the vision he has conceived?”⁴⁰

In Germany the metaphors—and the appetite for destruction—were eerily similar. The year Adolf Hitler rose to power, he was depicted by a cartoonist in the satirical magazine *Kladderadatsch* (onomatopoeia for “crash”) as “the sculptor of Germany.” Hitler is shown smashing a modernist sculpture of figures in a chaotic jumble, which seems to have been crafted by the stereotypically Jewish-looking artist who stands behind him in a smock, looking at first

³⁷ Qtd. in Michaud, 1.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Qtd. in Michaud, 2.

⁴⁰ Qtd. in Martin Jay, “‘The Aesthetic Ideology’ as Ideology: Or, What Does It Mean to Aestheticize Politics?” *Cultural Critique* 21 (Spring 1992): 44-45.

dumbly interested in Hitler's reaction to his work, and then visibly horrified at the Führer's incredible violence (Fig. 1.7). The "degenerate" artist disappears from view in the cartoon's remaining two frames, in which Hitler reshapes the formless mass of the earlier sculpture into a perfect neo-classical male figure with rippling muscles and clenched fists. Commenting later on the importance of art as material and metaphor to the Nazi state, Hitler "declared his belief that artistic activity is the process by which a people produces itself as a people."⁴¹

The metaphor of the polity as a sculptural form is but one variation on a theme in a much longer, fraught history of aesthetic ideology that extends from the fascists back to the eighteenth-century Jena Romantics, and yet further back to Greece.⁴² The role aesthetics ought to play in forming an ideal state—and what, indeed, "aesthetics" means in the first place—has been debated by some of the foremost philosophical thinkers over the last several centuries, indicating its continued centrality to conceptions of the state and its distinct or intersecting spheres of human activity. Historian Martin Jay has outlined competing orientations to the aestheticization of politics, surveying both the writings of detractors and defenders, including Walter Benjamin, Friedrich Nietzsche, Paul de Man, Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, Jean-Luc Nancy, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Hannah Arendt. Jay differentiates three interpretations of "the aesthetic" in formulations of aestheticized politics, in each case serving as coded language for something more specific (though not historically isolated). The aesthetic has been used 1) to justify the exaltation of destruction and violence as beautiful; 2) to denote "elitist implications of the artist who expresses his... will through the shaping of unformed matter," which is then extended as a metaphor to characterize state-making, as in Mussolini's Italy; and 3) to mean "the

⁴¹ Michaud, 36.

⁴² Josef Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989).

victory of the spectacle over the public sphere... insofar as the aesthetic is identified with the seductive power of images, whose appeal to mute sensual pleasure seems to undercut rational deliberation,” precisely the kind of aestheticized politics so forcefully condemned in Benjamin’s writing.⁴³ “In this cluster of uses,” Jay adds, “the aesthetic is variously identified with irrationality, illusion, fantasy, myth, sensual seduction, the imposition of will, and inhumane indifference to ethical, religious, or cognitive considerations.”⁴⁴

But whether the aestheticization of politics is a rhetorical strategy that always leads to—or at least creates the framework for—fascism remains open to question. Jay looks to Paul de Man (noting de Man’s own complicated relationship with fascism) for a measured, if ultimately unsympathetic, discussion of the Nazi adaptation of Romantic ideas. “Citing a passage from Goebbels’s novel *Michael*, which includes the claim that ‘politics are the plastic art of the state,’ [de Man] concedes that ‘it is a grievous misreading of Schiller’s aesthetic state.’ But he then adds, ‘the principle of this misreading does not essentially differ from the misreading which Schiller inflicted on his predecessor, namely Kant.’ In other words, for all their emancipatory intentions, Kant and even more so Schiller spawned a tradition that contained the potential to be transformed into a justification for fascism.”⁴⁵ Josef Chytry, a political historian who has written on the history of aesthetic ideology, seeks in his comprehensive study *The Aesthetic State* to posit a more nuanced, recuperative reading of the Romantics that does not chart an inevitable end in Nazism, but instead sees other radical possibilities in their propositions. Chytry writes, “rather than yearning to create a fully aestheticized form of life in which all differentiations were collapsed, Schiller was cognizant of the need to maintain certain distinctions. Rather than seek a

⁴³ Jay, “The Aesthetic Ideology,” 44-45.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

complete totalization based on the eidaesthetic fiat of a dominating artist/politician, Schiller was sensitive to the value of preserving the nonidentical and the heterogeneous.”⁴⁶ Chytry thus divorces Schiller from the legacy of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Richard Wagner’s totalizing aesthetic vision that has also been widely invoked as one of the formational elements of Nazi ideology. Martin Jay, too, concludes ambivalently, ending his discussion with passages from the writings of Jean-François Lyotard and Hannah Arendt, both of whom found interest in a non-totalizing version of aesthetic ideology. “Both Lyotard’s and Arendt’s thoughts on the potentially benign links between aesthetic judgment and politics serve as useful reminders that not every variant of the aestheticization of politics must lead to the same dismal end.” Polemically, he adds, “The wholesale critique of ‘the aesthetic ideology,’ to return to our initial question, can thus be itself deemed ideological if it fails to register the divergent implications of the application of the aesthetic to politics. For ironically, when it does so, it falls prey to the same homogenizing, totalizing, covertly violent tendencies it too rapidly attributes to ‘the aesthetic’ itself.”⁴⁷

The literature on Beuys takes two opposing positions vis-à-vis questions of aesthetic ideology, both of which fail to capture the complexity and contradiction of Beuys’s rhetoric. Those who uncritically laud his practice have neglected to investigate the evident similarities between the rhetoric of social sculpture and that of historical forms of aestheticized politics, including fascism, thereby mirroring Beuys’s own feigned ignorance of historical precedent.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Josef Chytry, *The Aesthetic State: A Quest in Modern German Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 51.

⁴⁷ Jay, “The Aesthetic Ideology,” 56.

⁴⁸ That such issues should be absent from recent retrospective exhibition catalogues, which richly illustrate and document Beuys’s projects, is alarming, though to be fair, it may reflect not curatorial or art-historical negligence, but rather the unwillingness of the influential Beuys Estate to address the legacy of Nazism and Beuys’s involvement in the war directly. I asked a number of interview subjects about the role of the estate in contemporary interpretation of Beuys’s work and each confirmed that the estate generally requires approval of a text before granting rights (and has demanded in the past that certain

On the other hand, those who robustly denounce him for such rhetoric, while understandably sensitive to the demonstrated repercussions of aesthetic ideology, fail to imagine—and perhaps find it inconceivable—that Beuys might be using it purposefully and even self-critically. Benjamin Buchloh, in the influential critique of Beuys he published in 1980, turns to Beuys’s relationship to German history after outlining the obvious fabrications of the “crash story.” He writes, “As much as Richard Wagner’s work anticipated and celebrated these collective regressions into Germanic mythology and Teutonic stupor in the realm of music, before they became the actual reality and the nightmare that set out to destroy Europe..., it would be possible to see in Beuys’ work the absurd aftermath of that nightmare, a grotesque coda acted out by a perfidious trickster.”⁴⁹ Buchloh later quotes Beuys at length advocating for what he considers the “misconception that politics could become a matter of esthetics,” which leads Buchloh to conclude that “the Futurist heritage has not only shaped Beuys’ sculptural thoughts, but even more so, it seems, his political ideas fulfill the criteria of the totalitarian in art just as they were propounded by Italian Futurism on the eve of European Fascism.” While Buchloh refrains from discussing Beuys’s own involvements in Germany’s fascist past, aside from ridiculing the crash story, later writers, including Frank Gieseke, Albert Markert, Beat Wyss, and Hans Peter Riegel, whose work I summarized in the introduction, maintain that Beuys sustained life-long associations with Nazi sympathizers and engaged with Nazi ideology throughout his career.

The evidence of such motivations, in my opinion, is thin and ambiguous. Unsurprisingly, Beuys has had his share of defenders in Europe and abroad, scholars who might sometimes find

lines be removed before granting such rights), and remains heavily involved in the planning of any solo exhibitions of Beuys’s work. The estate has publicly sued several institutions and individuals in the last decade, making open and experimental discourse around Beuys’s work in the space of the museum or the exhibition catalogue less and less likely, as curators and museum directors fear legal repercussions for contravening the stated preferences of the estate.

⁴⁹ Buchloh, “Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol,” 35-40.

his work and rhetoric uncomfortably opaque or even troubling, but who nevertheless see in his work a project of historical significance worth salvaging. American art historian Gene Ray, drawing on earlier writing by Kim Levin,⁵⁰ has made what is perhaps the most productive proposal, namely that just under the surface of Beuys's stated aims and ideas was, in fact, a project of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past. Ray starts from the premise that Beuys's work, by nature of his service in the Luftwaffe, has "an inescapable relation with that catastrophe" and "it makes no difference at all whether Beuys acknowledged this relation or was even fully aware of it."⁵¹ Ray cites examples from Beuys's oeuvre that overtly reference the Nazi era, including his submission to the 1957-58 competition for a memorial at Auschwitz (which is now entombed in the vitrine *Auschwitz Demonstration*, part of the permanent installation *Block Beuys*), his use of fat as an invocation of the corporeality of Holocaust victims, and numerous installations involving felt and wooden structures that recall camp barracks and their spare amenities. Ray presented his findings in a 1998 symposium on Beuys's legacy, and even Buchloh, who was a key participant, reluctantly admitted that there might be more to Beuys than he had been able to countenance.⁵² Ray does not, however, explicitly connect the project of coming to terms with the past with Beuys's aesthetic ideology,

⁵⁰ See Kim Levin, "Joseph Beuys: The New Order," *Arts Magazine* (April 1980).

⁵¹ Gene Ray, "Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (New York: D.A.P. with The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), 58.

⁵² Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, "Reconsidering Joseph Beuys Once Again," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (New York: D.A.P. with The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), 75-89. Buchloh's paper was not a full retreat from his earlier arguments; while he conceded that some of the conference presentations opened onto new understandings of Beuys's work, he maintained that Beuys was guilty of contaminating, with his insistent turns to the mythical, the formal, structural, anti-metaphorical, and anti-narrative specificities of the historical and post-war avant-gardes. In Buchloh's words, Beuys favored "a renewed foregrounding of the artist as a privileged being" (82) and made a "perpetual attempt to reposition the work of art in the perspective of spirituality and transcendentalism that I find problematic" (87).

perhaps understanding Beuys's goal of healing society (through social sculpture) to be linked to the Nazi past generally.

In 2013, theorist Thierry de Duve proposed a middle path between valorizing and condemning Beuys's aesthetic ideology in a lecture titled "Joseph Beuys and the German Past, Tentatively," delivered at NYU's Institute of Fine Arts. He traces a history of aesthetic education in Germany from the *Darmstadt Sieben* (Darmstadt Seven), a precursor of the influential *Deutsche Werkbund*, up to the Bauhaus, and then fast-forwards to World War II, rehearsing some of the many Nazi invocations of aesthetics. He then discusses the post-war foundation (by Sophie Scholl's surviving sister) of a Bauhaus-inspired *Volkshochschule* (adult education center) in Ulm, dedicated to *Wiederaufbau* (reconstruction). Walter Gropius, speaking of the "human being as the measure of all things," gave the school's inaugural address, explicitly connecting the school with the Bauhaus in order to, in de Duve's words, "close the parenthesis of the Nazi period." De Duve, no doubt inspired by Ray's writings, concludes by outlining how Beuys might represent an alternative to that "closed parenthesis" version of history and coming to terms with the past. For de Duve, Beuys desired to unearth what the Scholl school would rather repress, opting to "inhabit the open wound" of history to try to remedy it from within, to heal same with same in a homeopathic sense. Although de Duve does not term this process of "inhabiting the wound" *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, he is, in sum, arguing that Beuys recognizes the trauma of the Nazi past as a still-open wound—which is to say that it is not, in effect, truly the past, but rather a feature of the present.

My own understanding of Beuys's relationship to the Nazi past aligns closely with that of Ray and de Duve, although what I find missing in both accounts is a confrontation with Beuys's insistent authority. Jan Verwoert neatly articulates this problematic, writing that Beuys, while

radical in many ways, often “assumed the traditional patriarchal position of the messianic proclaimer of ultimate truths,”⁵³ which strikes me as a dangerous position when undergirded by aesthetic ideology that, as we have seen, relates strongly to the Nazi past. Hitler was nothing if not a messianic patriarch who proclaimed ultimate truths. Verwoert makes the compelling case, however, that “the artistic quality and historical significance of Beuys’ work are not, as the common view would have it, based upon a realizing of his declared intentions, but rather upon his staging of an unresolved conflict between the urge to demolish authoritarian definitions of what artists are traditionally supposed to be and the need to recoup certain aspects of fascination with the auratic authority of the artistic act and the artist’s role.”⁵⁴ Together, these three readings open up the possibility that Beuys was indeed staging certain forms of authority or features of aesthetic ideology in order to illuminate the ways in which they are still alive.

Here we can finally start to make out the shapes of the complex and confusing stew of ideas and forms with which Beuys was working. Like Verwoert, I see a fundamental tension between social sculpture and its aim to empower everyone’s creativity towards social betterment, on the one hand, and Beuys’s occupation of positions of authority—whether artist, teacher, or healer—on the other. As we have seen, though, social sculpture is itself bound up with issues of authority, invoking as it does the fascist rhetoric of the polity as a sculpture-in-becoming. It seems important to note that whereas Hitler, Mussolini, and others each saw themselves as the master sculptor of the masses, Beuys wanted the masses to rise up and sculpt society together, with decentralized power in the form of direct democracy through referendum. But of course, as Verwoert points out, Beuys has to take on authoritative roles in order to communicate this

⁵³ Jan Verwoert, “The Boss: On the Unresolved Question of Authority in Joseph Beuys’ Oeuvre and Public Image.” *e-flux journal*, no. 1 (December 2008): 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

message, creating an untenable, unresolvable situation. While Verwoert focuses on Beuys's performances, I want to focus in what remains of this chapter on the aspect of Beuys's work that most directly relates to political authority: those social-sculptural projects, beginning with the German Student Party, that import political forms into artistic contexts, reinforcing Beuys's authority by virtue of the hierarchical structures they bring with them. Those hierarchies in turn magnify Beuys's authority as an artist-author—an aligning of subject-positions (political organization leader, artist, author) that explain Beuys's intensely powerful charismatic persona. But I also want to argue that Beuys's ongoing production of objects, which continually reconstitute him as an artist-author and tether his political projects to artistic institutions, paradoxically mitigate his authority. Beuys persists in producing objects not just because they expressively illustrate his message in the present, but because they can carry that message into the future—a forward orientation that betrays Beuys's acknowledgement of his own limitations. In the end we understand the degree to which art can subsume the forms of politics but remains itself a neutered social force, only capable of realizing its revolutionary potential in a future that it cannot alone generate.

“A Social Organism as a Work of Art”

The day that Beuys founded the German Student Party on the lawn of the Kunstakademie in front of an assembled crowd of students, administrators, faculty, and invited press, he explained the party's purposes in characteristically obtuse jargon, refusing to pre-emptively translate Beuysian terminology into concepts that the press might have been able to grasp. Courting confusion, he enthusiastically proclaimed, “We want something new—that comes out of art! So we are starting that logically here in an art academy. Logically, because it has to do

with an expanded notion of art—which, however, is not so immediately understood by an art academy, which is why we’re standing [...] here on the lawn!”⁵⁵ None of the reporters on the scene had the necessary tools to comprehend what Beuys meant by invoking an “expanded notion of art,” though they might have inferred, more or less correctly, that what Beuys was proposing was that art should model social change—and that the art school as an institution was a valid space in which politics could be exercised. Reporters probed Beuys after the announcement with questions about his motivations; most inquiries served chiefly to illuminate the fact that, while they were willing to show up and bear witness to Beuys’s announcement, they were confused as to whether to take it seriously.⁵⁶ Questions were tinged with skepticism and doubt, fundamentally asking if the party was meant to be real politics or play-acting; one reporter even baldly offered that the student party seemed “doomed to failure” (“*zum Scheitern verurteilt*”).⁵⁷

The founding of the German Student Party was Beuys’s first public social-sculptural gesture, his first attempt to put the “expanded notion” into practice in a way that did not only involve the production of physical objects or the pedagogical methods he employed in his classroom. The party represented Beuys’s first test of bureaucratic politics as a transportable form, the outlines of which could be plucked from civic life and staged in an artistic context, namely an art school. But what does the form of the political party afford? A party is generally

⁵⁵ “Wir wollen etwas Neues - aus der Kunst heraus! Deshalb beginnen wir logischerweise hier in einer Kunstakademie damit. Logischerweise - weil es sich nämlich um einen Erweiterten Kunstbegriff handelt—wird das aber auch an einer Kunstakademie nicht sofort verstanden, weshalb wir ja jetzt hier auf der Wiese stehen!,” my translation, quoted in Johannes Stüttgen, *Der ganze Riemen: Der Auftritt von Joseph Beuys als Lehrer—die Chronologie der Ereignisse an der Staatlichen Kunstakademie Düsseldorf 1966-72* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König with the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt, 2008,) 81.

⁵⁶ Stüttgen describes the response of the press in great detail in *Ibid.*, 79-89.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 82.

conceived as a group of citizens with a common worldview and shared ideas about how government ought to be run—who should be in charge, which values should be prioritized, and what laws should be passed to uphold those values. The goal is to persuade the voting public that your view, as a party, is the correct one, which would result in members of the party attaining power in the form of elected and appointed governmental positions. Founding a political party would allow Beuys to stage social sculptures and propagandize social sculpture as an idea simultaneously; the publicness afforded by political organizations further offered a way to package social sculpture as a political platform that could be disseminated through the usual channels of political speech.

Parties are also, practically speaking, bureaucratic organizations, usually with their own internal hierarchies that place a certain number of individuals in leadership. In founding the party with a few students close to him, Beuys automatically placed himself at the head of the party—which, in a sense, seems all too natural given his position as a professor and the party's constitution as a party for students. Although it was meant to be understood as a meta-party, with everyone considered a student (just as everyone was an artist), it nevertheless, in its arrangement from the start, positioned Beuys as founder and disseminator of ideas, as party leader, visionary artist, and radical teacher all rolled into one.

Beuys and his compatriots registered the German Student Party with state government a few days after its founding, giving the appearance that they wanted the party to be publicly legitimate, not merely a short-lived stunt or student club. By the fall, Beuys had also worked with his student Johannes Stüttgen, by then firmly installed as his right-hand man, to design and have manufactured a round stamp displaying the party's insignia (Fig. 1.8). The stamp allowed him to brand and distribute typewritten tracts and protocols by the hundreds with help from a

core group of Kunstakademie students, who would form an assembly line to help compile such documents for distribution. This immediate gesture towards reproducibility and dissemination as an integral mode of Beuys's political activities strongly recalls Walter Benjamin's writing on the relationship between reproducibility and politics, in which he formulates technological reproducibility (and its attendant diminishment of aura) as the means by which art can communicate progressive politics to the masses.

The production of the stamp and the prodigious creation of documents-cum-art objects that followed also illustrate the extent to which Beuys's work, though seemingly more conceptual than ever, was still grounded in materiality. Many historians and curators tend to mark the late 1960s, just after the creation of the German Student Party, as a turning point for Beuys, away from sculpture proper and towards dematerialized social sculpture. In a recent exhibition of Beuys's mid-career work at New York's Rooster Gallery, for example, the curator of the show wrote in a press release that this period constituted a "procedural shift," in which Beuys moved "from maker of objects to artistic philosopher," articulating a common view of the impact of social sculpture on Beuys's work. Beuys himself seemed to espouse these exact sentiments in what has become a frequently cited passage from an interview with the American artist, curator, and publisher Willoughby Sharp, conducted for *Artforum* in 1969, just two years after Beuys founded his political party. "To be a teacher is my greatest work of art," Beuys told Sharp. "The rest is the waste product, a demonstration... Objects aren't very important for me anymore. I want to get to the origin of matter, the thought behind it."⁵⁸

But the shift Beuys claimed for himself, away from objects and towards the thoughts behind them, was not as cut-and-dried as even he might have thought. At the end of the interview with Sharp, Beuys is pressed to define his relationship with sculpture, as Sharp observes that,

⁵⁸ Willoughby Sharp, "An Interview with Joseph Beuys," *Artforum* (December 1969).

despite claiming objects are waste products, he nevertheless has continued making them. Beuys replies, ambivalently, “I have no interest in production as such. I am neither interested in making works for commerce nor for the pure pleasure of seeing them. It is getting much harder to make things. But one is forced to translate thought into action and action into object.” Relating his work as an artist to that of a scientist, he adds, “The physicist can think about the theory of atoms or about physical theory in general. But to advance his theories he has to build models, tangible systems. He too has to transfer his thought into action, and the action into an object.”⁵⁹ Here, at the less quotable conclusion to the interview, we witness Beuys wrestling aloud with the contradictions of his practice, recognizing that one can prioritize ideas but also see them concretized in objects—that, in fact, ideas *need* to be acted upon in the production of objects, if at the very least to offer a model for how desires for social betterment can lead, through action, to actual material results.

Beuys had a somewhat more resolved attitude a year later when the dealers Jörg Schellmann and Bernd Klüser interviewed him for a text that would be printed in the first edition of Beuys’s catalogue raisonné of multiples, a medium that, as I discuss further in Chapter 2, Beuys took up with gusto at the same time that he turned to political forms. “Objects are only understandable in relation to my ideas,” Beuys explained. “The work I do politically has a different effect on people because such a product exists than it would if the ideas behind them were only the written word. Although these products may not seem suitable for bringing about political change, I think more emanates from them than if the ideas behind them were revealed directly.”⁶⁰ Beuys seems to be saying, contrary to what he told Sharp, that his objects indeed

⁵⁹ Ibid.

reveal the project of social sculpture better than his own speech. In a much later appearance on the Austrian talk show “Club 2,” Beuys affirmed the priority of objects even more strongly: “...if the theory behind the work were the actual work, then I wouldn’t have to make something which was to be perceived through the sense organs, then I could have just depicted it in a number of logical sentences. I think nowadays there’s a deep misunderstanding amongst people that art should be understood through logical sentences which are in this frontal region of thinking,” Beuys continued, pointing to his forehead, “this intellectual way of thinking in causality.... Now the task of art isn’t to be understood through this cerebral, thin, intellectual way of thinking, but rather art has to be understood”—Beuys motions from his head down his body—“in the sense of completely understanding.”⁶¹ There is more here to unpack than what proves relevant to the discussion at hand—the role of objects vis-à-vis Beuys’s importation of political forms into his work—but one important admission should be highlighted before we return to Beuys’s political organizations. Art objects, according to Beuys, are more than just the theory they illustrate. They exceed concept, they appeal to more than just rational logic, they engage us, in other words, differently than the written word or the spoken idea. While Beuys still understands his objects to be doing the work of communicating the concept of social sculpture, he tacitly admits that, by virtue of being works of art, they exceed that intended function. In consistently making objects, Beuys creates openings for meanings other than his own—in a sense mitigating the totalizing quality of his overarching ideas.

Let us return to the German Student Party, which wound up being a relatively short-lived organization, at least under that name. Within six months of its founding, the party was renamed

⁶⁰ Jörg Schellmann, Bernd Klüser, and Joseph Beuys, “Questions to Joseph Beuys,” in *Joseph Beuys: Die Multiples*, eds. Jörg Schellmann and Bernd Klüser, trans. Caroline Tisdall, n.p. (Munich: Verlag Schellmann & Klüser, 1977).

⁶¹ *Club 2*, “Kunst oder Schwindel?” (Art or Fraud?) ORF, January 27, 1983.

“Fluxus Zone West,” much to the chagrin of Fluxus practitioners from whom Beuys had long since separated.⁶² Beuys, of course, immediately had a stamp made with a new insignia, and began stamping ephemera and other objects with the name Fluxus Zone West (Fig. 1.9). In the rebranding, Beuys traded political terminology and the nominal connection to contemporaneous student movements for an explicit invocation of Fluxus—which, to those in the know, was an invocation of Fluxus not as a style of art or movement, but rather as an organized international network. The extent to which the arrangement of the German Student Party changed or stayed the same when its name was amended is unclear, but the effect of the rebranding was to subsume the activities of the party under the heading of a recognizable art movement with which Beuys was already strongly associated, having organized a number of Fluxus festivals and concerts that caused scandals significant enough to land them in the newspapers. The German Student Party had certainly played with spectacle at its opening event, but not to the degree that the name Fluxus suggested. Inviting reporters to witness the founding of the party and then establishing it as a legitimate organization with city government seemed to indicate that Beuys wanted to be taken seriously as a political actor beyond the confines of the academy, but what did his turn back to Fluxus signal? What I believe we can glean from this episode—and from others that followed—is a conflicted picture of Beuys not quite knowing where his message about social sculpture would best be situated, nor how it should be rhetorically framed.

⁶² Wolf Vostell, who mostly operated independently of Fluxus but maintained a positive relationship with Maciunas, issued a manifesto against Beuys’s renaming of the Deutsche Studentenpartei as Fluxus Zone West—an incident discussed at length in Stüttgen, *Der ganze Riemen*, 415-419. It should be noted that there was no Fluxus Zone East (or north or south) that Beuys was playing against; according to Beuys’s earliest biographer, “Zone West,” was meant to be a reference to “the situation of western man” and the “horizon of western culture” that had shaped the Western world to the exclusion of Eastern perspectives and traditions. Along with art and science (and art and politics), East and West symbolized poles that Beuys sought to join in his work, often referring to himself as a Eurasian (somewhat tongue-in-cheek) and playing up his rescue at the hands of nomadic Tatars in the Crimea, a crossroads between East and West. See Adriani, Konnertz, and Thomas, *Joseph Beuys*, 162.

The controlled chaos of Fluxus—and the interest of certain Fluxus artists, such as Robert Filliou, in alternative pedagogy—was indeed at hand in some of the events that defined Beuys’s time at the academy after the German Student Party (as such) had been phased out. In 1969, Beuys, together with his student Jörg Immendorff, organized a “free school” called LIDL inside the Kunstakademie, creating a frenzied atmosphere in which students taught informal classes and organized political actions, contravening state policies against such activities taking place in municipal buildings and utterly frustrating professors who wanted to teach their classes as usual (Fig. 1.10). After several days, the education minister of the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen evicted Beuys and his students and shut down the academy completely for several weeks while they decided if and how to censure Beuys, Immendorff, and others.⁶³

Just as Beuys had moved the announcement of the German Student Party from the foyer of the academy to its front steps to comply with state regulations, so too did LIDL continue hosting activities in front of the academy after its removal from the building. Photographs accompanying an article in the *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten* on the school’s closure show Beuys sitting outside in his Stetson hat, signing a massive pile of wooden boxes in the midst of chaos (Fig. 1.11). The box was Beuys’s multiple *Intuition*, which was produced by VICE-Versand in an unlimited edition that amounted over many years to more than 12,000 exemplars (Fig. 1.12). It appears to be a homely, empty wooden box, until one looks closely and notices two hand-drawn lines under the word “Intuition,” written in pencil on the inside of the box. By the time of *Intuition*’s initial release the year before LIDL, in 1968, the wooden or cardboard box had become a common container format for multiples that combined several objects, sometimes creating confusion as to whether the box was part of the multiple or a mere protective cover or convenient unifier. George Maciunas had used different kinds of boxes for his Fluxkits and

⁶³ Ibid., 188-189.

Fluxboxes, which compiled works by various artists, as well as for single-author works he assembled, including George Brecht's popular 1963 multiple *Water Yam*, which contains small typed notecards with instructions, a format also used by Robert Filliou for his aptly titled 1965 multiple *Ample Food for Stupid Thought* (Figs. 1.13-.14). Beuys, too, employed the pairing of a box with instructional notes in his first multiple for Edition René Block, titled *Evervess II I*, released in 1968 (Fig. 1.15). The instructions, printed on the lid, direct the purchaser of the work to open one of the two bottles inside and drink the contents, then throw it away—instructions that would, in their fulfilling, destroy the work of art and leave the box half empty.

Intuition had originally been released with a more evocative title, *Intuition... statt Kochbuch* (Intuition... instead of a cookbook), making explicit that intuition ought to be a substitute for a predetermined “recipe.”⁶⁴ Beuys pointedly replaces instructions and interactive props for performance with a simple, open directive, underscored twice with lines drawn in two directions, subtly hinting at moments of conflict or tension in which one's intuition might be useful. The appearance of the *Intuition* boxes on the front steps of the academy during its emergency closure in 1969 was mere happenstance; Wolfgang Feelisch, the publisher of VICE-Versand who also fabricated the boxes, periodically dropped off several hundred to be signed. The image of Beuys signing his multiples, however, cast the LIDL debacle in a slightly different light, and opened up the meaning of the box in a new direction. Surrounded by a mound of neat wooden boxes on one side and the chaos of LIDL on the other, Beuys appeared as a working artist, for whom the production of objects for sale was in fact consummate with his radical and disruptive alternative pedagogy. As he affirmed that year in the interview with Willoughby Sharp for *Artforum*, thought needs to be transformed into action, which then needs to be turned into

⁶⁴ See VICE-Versand's sales brochure *Zeitkunst für den Haushalt* (Topical Art for Your Household), ed. Wolfgang Feelisch (Reimscheid: VICE-Versand, 1968).

object. An image in which Beuys is captured between his objects and the political action in which he was taking part (and had indeed initiated) perfectly symbolizes the cycle of transformation Beuys advocated. Though the box's advocacy of intuition as a guiding principle follows from Beuys's concept of social sculpture, it would seem not to relate closely to Beuys's engagement with political action. But the box's erstwhile role in the unfolding of LIDL not only makes it a trace, to some degree, of that event, it also re-contextualizes the box's very materials: the spartan unvarnished wood no longer so readily calls up other Fluxus multiples stuffed with doo-dads and instructions, but looks instead like an object born of emergency, its simplicity, like that of earlier sculptures by Beuys, a sign of barebones subsistence. It calls up the Zero Hour that left West Germans with only bits of rubble to rebuild their lives, and, more pertinently, the state of emergency that engulfed the student movement. The mound of boxes next to Beuys in the newspaper photographs, recast in that context, look more like a barricade than a pile of commodity-forms.

Not long after the LIDL episode, Beuys turned his attention from Fluxus Zone West (which was never retired, but receded into the background) to the short-lived *Organisation der Nichtwähler, Freie Volksabstimmung* (Organization for Non-Voters – Free Referendum), founded in March 1970. The mission of the group was to discourage citizens from voting in order to effect a mass disruption of the parliamentary system. Beuys continued to advocate for non-voting as a viable strategy of protest even as he formed the *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum) a little over a year later, on June 1, 1971. He set up a storefront office in the center of Düsseldorf, marking the first time he had sited one of his political organizations entirely in a space outside of an arts institution—but only just barely. The relatively spare office was used for meetings of the

organization and its windows displayed political tracts and advertisements for events (Figs. 1.16-.17). It also happened to be located at Andreasstraße 25, mere steps away from both Galerie Schmela, where Beuys had famously explained pictures to a dead hare in 1965, and the Kunsthalle Düsseldorf, a center for contemporary art that had opened in 1967. Beuys thus situated the office as close to the inside of an art institution as it could be while still maintaining a level of autonomy. Though the address of the office crops up in many mentions of the organization across Beuys scholarship, the proximity of the office to Düsseldorf's prominent art spaces is never made explicit or meaningful. Some writers seem to delight in the idea that Beuys managed a political action group much as a non-artist would, but I would argue that the office, given its closeness to two art spaces important to Beuys, was indeed viewed as part and parcel of Beuys's artistic practice.

If that relationship between the organization and Beuys's status as an artist had been ambiguous on the day of the office's opening, it was clarified, at least for some, less than three weeks later, when Beuys staged an *Aktion* together with galerie art intermedia in Cologne. In the *Aktion*, Beuys handed out a newly produced multiple—a vinyl shopping bag emblazoned recto and verso with diagrams explaining how the “dictatorship of the parties” could be overcome, and stuffed with documents outlining the Organization for Direct Democracy's platform and agenda (Fig. 1.18). The demonstration was essentially a street performance sponsored by an experimental gallery, offering a gimmicky souvenir, much like a pen or a mug bearing a company logo. By virtue of its channels of distribution, however, the bag—and the political tracts stuffed inside—were also treated as art objects, ensuring the legacy of the Organization for Direct Democracy far into a future in which the shopping bag would accrue value and assure its own preservation. To that point, it should be noted that some of the bags contained felt alongside

printed propaganda; while Claudia Mesch has argued that the felt stuffed into some of the bags added a political dimension to Beuys's prior use of felt, I would flip her argument: the felt was a reminder, to people encountering Beuys and the bags that day, that what the bags advertised, the Organization for Direct Democracy, was as integral a part of Beuys's oeuvre as the felt sculptures he had begun making a decade earlier.⁶⁵

The bags, which had been printed in a massive edition of 10,000, reappeared a year later, in the summer of 1972, when Beuys temporarily transported his organization into an exhibition space by using his allotted gallery at *documenta 5* to host what he called the *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum) (Fig. 1.19). *Documenta 5* was the first to be directed by a guest curator, Swiss-born Harald Szeemann, who orchestrated the belated debut of Fluxus, Happenings, and *Aktionskunst*, all of which had been absent from the relatively conservative *documenta 4* in 1968. Szeemann pointedly replaced *documenta*'s long-standing subtitle, "Museum der 100 Tage" (100-Day Museum), with the apt new tagline "100-Tage Ereignis" (100-Day Event or Happening), underscoring both his emphasis on time- and performance-based art, and his idea that the entire exhibition constituted an event, which he himself composed. Beuys's office, installed on the ground floor of *documenta*'s main venue, the Museum Fridericianum, was meant to function as a site of discourse and debate, with Beuys, fellow Düsseldorfer Karl Fastabend, and others handing out tracts, pamphlets, and plastic bags, and engaging visitors in discussion about the nature of democracy and the ills of the West German parliamentary system.

⁶⁵ Claudia Mesch, "Problems of Remembrance in Postwar German Performance Art" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1997), 280.

Szeemann divided his mega-exhibition into a number of themes, and included Beuys under the heading *Individuelle Mythologien* (Individual Mythologies), even though the nature of Beuys's office might have suggested *Information*, another option, as a more appropriate context. Although Beuys, among the artists included under the heading Individual Mythologies, was perhaps the mythological artist-figure par excellence, the office was meant to elicit dialogue, not on the subject of Beuys but on an issue of vital social importance. The persona suggested by Szeemann's theme, however, was indeed present in the office, which one could see simply in the office's arrangement. Beuys, and sometimes some of his colleagues, sat behind the desk with their backs to the wall, receiving visitors who came in to the office and sat or stood in front of them, as if coming into the office of a teacher or a supervisor. Beuys was present every day—the desks, file boxes, and tracts that he had brought into the space were almost never allowed to sit inactive, as if they were a sculptural installation. It was clear that Beuys was there to conduct office hours and disseminate information, and his presence was essential.

Although Beuys would later claim that “there was no artwork at all” in his contribution to *documenta 5*,⁶⁶ that he merely showed up and talked to people for the duration of the exhibition, there were indeed artistic markers in the office. On one wall of the gallery, Beuys hung a neon sign of the organization's name in scrawling script (likely his own) at an extreme diagonal, extending from floor to ceiling (Fig. 1.20). Beuys's neon sign recalled the work of Bruce Nauman and Joseph Kosuth, transforming (or bastardizing) their stark minimal-conceptual gestures into one with an explicit politics. Though Nauman was represented at *documenta 5* with a torqued wooden structure in the “Idea + Idea/Light” section of the exhibition, his neon works had been seen across Western Europe since *documenta 4*, which included his 1967 neon line

⁶⁶ Beuys made this statement in a taped interview conducted in English, likely dating from the late 1970s, that appears in the 2017 documentary *Beuys*, directed by Andres Veiel.

“drawing” cheekily titled *My Last Name Exaggerated Fourteen Times Vertically* (Fig. 1.21). Whereas Nauman had also become known for forming neon tubing into absurdist signatures, non-declarative squiggles, poetic, aphoristic statements (such as the apropos “the true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths”), or evocative sets of words that lit up in rhythmic, associative succession (Fig. 1.22), Kosuth (represented at *documenta 5* through the group Art & Language) had used the neon sign ironically, as the perfect form for illustrating the system of signification that arbitrarily links language and the material world (Fig. 1.23). Beuys’s neon sign returned the form to its base commercial advertising function: it was signage. Importantly, however, it advertised not only the organization that sponsored the office, but also, in its handwritten scrawl, the fact that both the organization and the office were considered Beuys’s work.

On the main table, next to copious piles of paper that strongly resembled Beuys’s felt stack sculptures, sat another object that I consider a pointed artistic gesture: a single red rose placed inside a tall narrow vase (Figs. 1.24). Beuys referred to it as the “rose for democracy,” and it offered a striking contrast to both the neon sign and the overall appearance of the office; a still-living thing, the rose variously symbolized love, romance, nature, and, to the Catholic visitor, the virtue of the Virgin Mary. The rose was invoked again shortly after *documenta 5*, when Beuys released a multiple consisting of a graduated beaker (in which the owner could place his or her own rose), incised around its middle with the title “rose for direct democracy” (which, etched in glass, resembled the office’s glowing neon sign) and at its base with the artist’s signature (Fig. 1.25). Placed in a graduated beaker more at home in a chemistry lab than in a laboratory for political thought, the rose obliquely referenced the two poles of Enlightenment thought—science and beauty—which would be unified, if metaphorically, in the utopia of

individual freedom Beuys envisioned. The beaker was released in an unlimited edition, with proceeds directed back to the Organization for Direct Democracy. The rose served triple duty, giving life and beauty to the office at *documenta 5* and later, through the incised beaker bearing its name, continuing to give form to what had been an ephemeral event, while also providing material support for the organization itself.

Beuys affirmed in other ways the ability of the art object to encapsulate both the notion of social sculpture and the durational social sculptures, like the Office for Direct Democracy, that he set into motion. The office attracted a handful of characters who took advantage of the open invitation for dialogue, including the Hamburg-based artist Thomas Peiter, who made frequent appearances dressed as the Renaissance artist Albrecht Dürer. In one heated exchange over terrorism as a response to state oppression, Peiter elicited from Beuys the inflammatory declaration that he could re-socialize the Red Army Faction (RAF) radicals Andreas Baader and Ulrike Meinhof by escorting them through *documenta*, as if to suggest that contemporary art could function as an antidote to violence. Peiter promptly made yellow demonstration placards with the phrase, “*Dürer, ich führe Baader-Meinhof persönlich durch die documenta V, J. Beuys*” (Dürer, I will personally lead Baader-Meinhof through *documenta V*), and carried them into the museum, depositing them in Beuys’s office (Fig. 1.26).⁶⁷

Beuys later appropriated the two placards to create a new work, leaning them side-by-side against a wall, with their wooden handles resting atop a pair of felt slippers filled with fat and rose petals, referencing both the “rose for democracy” and Beuys’s sculptural practice (in which fat played a central role as a conductor of warmth and symbol of transmittable energy)

⁶⁷ Andreas Quermann, ‘*Demokratie ist lustig*’: *Der politische Künstler Joseph Beuys* (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 2006), 168; and Veit Loers and Pia Witzmann, eds., *Joseph Beuys die Documenta Arbeit* (Kassel: Museum Fridericianum and Edition Cantz, 1993), 114. See also Pamela Kort, “Dürer, ich führe persönlich Baader + Meinhof durch die Dokumenta V,” in *Joseph Beuys: Jeder Griff muß sitzen – Just Hit the Mark* (London and New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2003), 70; 104-106.

(Fig. 1.27). Beuys's decision to face the slippers towards the wall communicates a fundamental ambivalence: either that terrorism would find its end at the conclusion of Beuys's promised art-tour re-education of the RAF, or that his absurd tour would in fact dead-end just as it began, for art is not a quick and easy cure for social ills. This particular work strikes me in two opposed ways, perhaps a measure of the ambivalence I see encapsulated in it. On the one hand, Beuys was open to Peiter's disruption and his mocking gesture, finally entombing the criticism of his own project within his own body of work. On the other hand, Beuys co-opts Peiter's position and assimilates the very materials of his critique into an artwork that functions as a relic of *documenta 5*, and therefore as a kind of advertisement for the Organization for Direct Democracy. Though Beuys was eager to say that he exhibited no art at *documenta* that year, he nevertheless transformed what could have been ephemeral—the rose for democracy, Peiter's interruption—into fodder for works of art that would last.

Let us also not forget that Beuys ended his time at *documenta 5* with the spectacle of a boxing match fought on behalf of direct democracy, another aspect of his participation that yielded a poster, a multiple, and a vitrine that contains relics of the fight, including the boxing gloves and rope. (In other words, another ephemeral event that found itself preserved in material things.) How did the boxing match function as the final event of 100 days of office hours? What kind of political discourse—or artistic practice—did it model? The match, in my judgment, clarified the aspect of artistic authority—certainly tied to individual mythology—that the Office for Direct Democracy, in its bland bureaucratic trappings, had tried to suppress. Just as the match was about marking a symbolic victory for direct democracy (rather than a fair fight between two equals, with an open outcome), the office, which played at dialogic exchange, was about the dissemination of information, which implies that one party—the artist—knows something vital

that his public does not. The notion of an office and its physical arrangement all but ensured that the dialogue was primarily unidirectional. The authority coded into the forms of the office were then further exacerbated by Beuys's position as the artist-author of the work, a fact continually manifest in his insistent signing of plastic democracy bags and political hand-outs (Fig. 1.28). Beuys apparently wanted to believe that his office was not a work of art, perhaps believing that if it were not a work of art, it might attain to "real" political action. But even if the office was not, by Beuys's decree, a "work of art," Beuys asserted himself as an artist-author over and over again in the space of the gallery, amplifying his celebrity and in turn his authority. The boxing match only brought to life what was already at hand, playing out less spectacularly every day in Beuys's office.

Two days after the boxing match at *documenta 5*, Beuys was fired from his post at the Kunstakademie. He had repeatedly admitted more students into his class than the government allowed, and in 1972, the minister of education was tired of Beuys's public flaunting of state-regulated restrictions and procedures.⁶⁸ The incident, which was widely covered in the German media and protested by students, faculty, politicians, and international artists alike, turned the spotlight onto Beuys (which he no doubt enjoyed) while at the same time depriving him of his primary platform for teaching and disseminating information. While such an incident might have been seen as damaging both to his authority and reputation, Beuys proved defiant: his dismissal made him a martyr for the student cause. He memorialized the day of his firing with a now iconic postcard edition in which he scrawled the phrase *Demokratie ist lustig* (Democracy is

⁶⁸ Beuys's abrupt dismissal was only possible because, unlike other professors at the academy, Beuys had never received *Beamter* (civil servant) status, which would have secured his job; as a result, it was fairly easy for the education minister of the state of Nordrhein-Westfalen, Johannes Rau, to remove him from his post by not renewing his contract at the outset of the winter semester. Beuys took the matter to court and eventually won; in 1978, he was finally granted his professor title and the lifelong right to use his classroom at the Kunstakademie, which he had never fully vacated. See, for example, Stüttgen, *Der ganze Riemen*, 97-98.

Merry) across a sepia-toned photograph of himself, grinning from ear to ear, taken by a bystander as he walked out of the Kunstakademie office past a line of police officers (Fig. 1.29).

Beuys's departure from the academy gave him the final push to develop teaching opportunities outside of state institutions, an idea he had been thinking about for several years, at least since the days of the LIDL academy. Together with two friends, Klaus Staeck, a multiples publisher and artist trained as a lawyer, and Heinrich Böll, a prominent writer, Beuys founded an independent school. It manifested six months after Beuys's departure from the Kunstakademie, in April 1973, as the *Freie Internationale Hochschule für Kreativität und interdisziplinäre Forschung* (Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research). The Free International University was originally billed as an alternative to the state school system and in 1974 and 1975, Beuys worked with Staeck to try to take over an abandoned hall in Düsseldorf to establish the university in a permanent space.⁶⁹ When they were unsuccessful in convincing the city of Düsseldorf to grant them access to the hall for free, Beuys continued to constitute the university as an itinerant, dispersed academy with informal homes in Dublin, several cities in Italy, and in his own studio.⁷⁰

Beuys also lectured actively in those years, conducting a lecture tour in the United States in 1974 with the help of Staeck and New York dealer Ronald Feldman, and producing a number of multiples that related to his talks and to the developments of the FIU. But at this moment, at the height of his international celebrity, Beuys privately expressed frustration at his continued inability to bring about the political change he desired. In a 1974 letter that is now in the

⁶⁹ Letter from Klaus Staeck to the Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf, dated. 30.4.1975. GRI Galerie Schmela Papers, Box 123, F11A. See also numerous documents in ZADIK, Bestand: Sammler Günther Ulbricht Akte: E002_VIII_005(Troost / Beuys Messehalle J. Beuys: Eine Strassenaktion (neugebildeter Titel), 1971 - 1972).

⁷⁰ Szeemann, *Joseph Beuys*, 259.

Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels in Cologne, Dr. Gerhard Storck, then head of the department of modern art at the Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf, writes to Beuys collector Günther Ulbricht to recount Beuys's recent visit to the museum. Beuys was invited to discuss some of his works on film, and at the conclusion of shooting, Storck informed him that Ulbricht had proposed mounting an exhibition of all of his multiples to date, which Ulbricht had dutifully collected. "In principle he was in agreement," Storck told Ulbricht, "but reckoned however that one should hold off because at the present moment his multiples can be seen everywhere. He seemed, by the way, a bit downcast, at the least disillusioned, due to the political situation and his relative ineffectiveness."⁷¹ It is not surprising that Beuys would have been frustrated in 1974, just a few months after German chancellor Willy Brandt had stepped down in the midst of an espionage scandal, a federal debacle that no doubt overshadowed efforts at grassroots organizing, including the work Beuys was trying to do with the Free International University at home and abroad. (Brandt was replaced with Helmut Schmidt, Brandt's former minister of finance and defense, thereby promising an extension of the frustrations Beuys and other progressives had had with the Brandt administration.) What is surprising, however, is that someone who wanted to communicate his ideas as far and wide as possible would decline to mount an exhibition of the multiples because he judged them to be too ubiquitous. He implies that an exhibition would be more attractive when the multiples become less visible—that is to say, he implies that the multiples are indeed better situated in a museum context as "props for memory," as he once called them, as objects that would prompt remembrance of his political activities at a time in the future when they were garnering less publicity.

⁷¹ "Er war im Prinzip einverstanden, meinte jedoch, daß man damit noch warten sollte, da im Augenblick überall Multiples von ihm zu sehen sind. - Er wirkte im übrigen ein wenig niedergeschlagen, zumindest desillusioniert, infolge der politischen Situation und seiner relativen Wirkungslosigkeit," my translation. Letter dated December 2, 1974. Günther Ulbricht papers, file E002, IV, 8 (Kunstmuseum Düsseldorf), Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels, Cologne.

Despite the widespread and influential activities of the FIU in the 1970s, Beuys's frustrations with political ineffectiveness would return—if ever they had gone away. Beuys ran unsuccessfully for public office in 1976, and would again campaign for office in 1979 and 1980, without winning a significant percentage of the vote. Whereas he had earlier tried to fight against the system, he now tried to work within its bounds to give voice to his concerns in parliamentary bodies, hoping to break them apart from within. The last of Beuys's campaigns had been under the banner of the newly created Green Party (*Die Grünen*), a party formed loosely at the federal level in 1980 out of many local and regional organizations and *Bürgerinitiativen* (citizens' initiatives), including Beuys's Organization for Direct Democracy and Free International University. Beuys attended the party's founding events in January 1980, and his writings on alternatives to parliamentary democracy and concepts borrowed from Rudolf Steiner were influential for numerous early supporters of the party. But despite Beuys's foundational role in the party, many Greens were bothered by his constant media presence and, above all, by his emphasis on ideas borrowed from Steiner, which they believed confounded potential voters and muddled the more specific aims of the party. Other Greens vigorously defended the unique role he played, which symbolized, for them, the Greens' heterogeneity and openness to alternative imaginings of government and society, which should come from artists as much as from anyone else. Lacking vocal support, Beuys was pushed out of contention for a spot in the *Bundestag* (German parliament) in 1983, the year the Greens finally won a handful of seats.⁷²

Beuys's disappointment with the Green Party was profound. As several of his interlocutors and friends explain in interviews in the 2017 documentary *Beuys*, he thought the

⁷² For a sense of Beuys's controversial role in the Green Party, see the roundtable discussion in "Überblick series on the parliamentary election," in *Joseph Beuys: The Reader*, eds. Claudia Mesch and Viola Miheley (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), 14. The animosity between Beuys and fellow Greens, which prevented him from running for office, is the likely reason his name rarely appears in chronicles of the early movement despite his notoriety at the time.

Green Party was going to be capable of doing what he had always wanted: it was to be an anti-party that would play the game of politics only to attempt to break the whole thing open. The founding event of the party was a riotous weekend of outlandish speeches and the forming of alliances among newly minted Greens from all corners of society, who shared a disdain for politics as usual and a desire to improve society holistically. Beuys, his friends report, found it fantastic. Beuys should have been an integral figure in the party's success—he had, for over a decade, lobbied his fellow citizens with ideas the Greens adopted, and had reinforced his own image of authority over and over again in that time. But as his student Johannes Stüttgen put it, reflecting on Beuys's career many years later, Beuys had underestimated the extent to which he occupied what Stüttgen called the “clown's corner,” that space in society reserved for artists.⁷³ It is a space that values freedom of expression, as Beuys had advocated so strenuously through his concept of social sculpture, but it also all but guaranteed that the nonart public felt no obligation to take you seriously. Importing the forms of politics into artistic contexts and concretizing the results in art objects does not necessarily result in the collapse of art and politics from the perspective of a nonart public. Even in the context of a newly created political party with a radical, experimental foundation, Beuys was seen as an artist first, a bombastic one at that, thanks to his constant visibility as a figure of the “art world” and his insistent use of aesthetic language to propose models for social change.

Beuys is not often seen as having much in common with the nascent institutional critique practices of the late 1960s and early 70s (and is often sharply contrasted with Hans Haacke in discussions of post-war German art), but I want to argue that we can understand Beuys's political

⁷³ Johannes Stüttgen, interview in the documentary short *Joseph Beuys 7000 Oaks: Documentation*, 2017, directed by Fabian Püschel, accessed August 12, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HE87qEUtApI>.

failures as similar tests of the limits of art. In 1970, Daniel Buren wrote, “Art, whatever else it may be, is exclusively political. What is called for is the *analysis of formal and cultural limits* (and not one or the other) within which art exists and struggles. These limits are many and of different intensities. Although the prevailing ideology and the associated artists try in every way to *camouflage* them, and although it is too early—the conditions are not met—to blow them up, the time has come to *unveil* them.”⁷⁴ Many critics would insist that Beuys is in fact one of the artists guilty of Buren’s charge of “camouflaging” the “prevailing ideology” through his appeals to mythology and his reinforcement of artistic authority. But the ideology at hand in Buren’s formulation, it seems to me, is the cultural construction of the art institution, and the naturalization of its autonomy from political life outside the museum. Beuys, however, in ultimately finding himself limited as a political actor because of his aesthetic rhetoric and labor within the institutions of art, illuminates—however unintentionally—the “formal and cultural limits... within which art exists and struggles.” In the end, Beuys’s authority proved ineffective because the “sphere of art,” which the neo-avant-garde believed had been dissolved into the broader, ever-shifting terrain of the social, remained, for many, something separate, with freedoms that simply do not translate into impactful political speech.

Beuys would have been familiar with the lectures of Frankfurt School Marxist thinker Herbert Marcuse, who was also struggling with the idea that art had revolutionary potential that simply could not be realized under present conditions. Marcuse dedicated a number of texts to the question of art’s role in a capitalist society that dictates all possibilities and ruthlessly reinscribes forms of negation within the existing regime—what Buren called the “prevailing ideology.” In his 1967 lecture “Art in the One-Dimensional Society,” Marcuse notes, “Since the thirties, we see the intensified and methodical search for... an artistic language as a revolutionary

⁷⁴ Daniel Buren, “Critical Limits” (1970), in *Five Texts* (New York: John Weber Gallery, 1974), 38.

language. This implies the concept of the *imagination* as a cognitive faculty, capable of transcending and breaking the spell of the Establishment.”⁷⁵ Though he never mentions Beuys by name, it sounds almost as though he is parroting the tenets of social sculpture word for word—actually recalling, in all likelihood, the Romantic aesthetic ideology on which social sculpture was based. Marcuse then moves on to address the role of art in social transformation: “‘political art’ is a monstrous concept, and art by itself could never achieve this transformation, but it could free the perception and sensibility needed for the transformation. And, once a social change has occurred, art, Form of the imagination, could guide the construction of the new society. And inasmuch as the aesthetic values are the non-aggressive values par excellence, art as technology and technique would imply the emergence of a new rationality in the construction of a free society...”⁷⁶ Tempering the power of the aesthetic, Marcuse quickly adds, “the realization of art as principle of social reconstruction *presupposes* fundamental social change. At stake is not the beautification of that which is, but the total reorientation of life in a new society.”⁷⁷

In the 1969 text *An Essay on Liberation*, Marcuse comments at much greater length on the potential power of the aesthetic, under the right historical conditions, to generate a “new sensibility.” Yet again, however, as soon as he lays out an argument avowing art’s promise, he backtracks, turning to a discussion of limitations that render art ineffective—art’s negative dialectic. “The most telling expression of the contradiction, the self-defeat, built into art,” he writes, is “the pacifying conquest of matter [in which] the transfiguration of the object remains

⁷⁵ Herbert Marcuse, “Art in the One-Dimensional Society,” *Arts Magazine* 41, no. 7 (May 1967): 114, italics in original.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, italics mine.

unreal—just as the revolution in perception remains unreal.”⁷⁸ The text vacillates between optimism and pessimism, ending on a mixed note:

the ‘mediations’ which would make the many forms of rebellious art a liberating force on the societal scale (that is to say, a subverting force) are yet to be attained. They would reside in modes of work and pleasure, of thought and behavior, in a technology and in a natural environment which express the aesthetic ethos of socialism. Then, art may have lost its privileged, and segregated, dominion over the imagination, the beautiful, the dream. This may be the future, but the future ingresses into the present: in its negativity, the desublimating art and anti-art of today ‘anticipate’ a stage where society’s capacity to produce may be akin to the creative capacity of art, and the construction of the world of art akin to the reconstruction of the real world—union of liberating art and liberating technology. By virtue of this anticipation, the disorderly, uncivil, farcical, artistic desublimation of culture constitutes an essential element of radical politics: of the subverting forces in transition.⁷⁹

Marcuse echoes Marx in his relegation of art to the realm of superstructure, arguing that art—and the other values for which it stands, including creativity and imagination—can have influence only after art has already been liberated from its “servitude to a repressive society.”⁸⁰ Beuys tirelessly insisted, on the contrary, that art in its most expanded sense—“Form of the imagination,” to use Marcuse’s phrase—should be the precise vehicle by which that servitude was superseded. That is the fundamental argument of social sculpture—that it is the model by which society can repair itself. Creative thought put into action is thus the means to attain a more democratic society, not the luxury or right waiting on the other side of revolution. Beuys’s rhetoric consistently rejected the notion that art merely “anticipates” social transformation; he believed instead that it is the instrument by which that transformation is achieved.

⁷⁸ Marcuse, *An Essay on Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 44.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁸⁰ Marcuse, “Society as a Work of Art [1967],” in *Art and Liberation: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse, Volume Four*, ed. Douglas Kellner (New York: Routledge, 2007), 128.

That was Beuys's explicitly articulated position, in any case. As I have argued, there is also evidence that he realized the limitations of his own activities, mirroring Marcuse's hesitations. But Beuys's misgivings about the efficacy of art in the present did not prevent him from investing, more so than Marcuse, in its possibilities for change in the future. As this chapter has hinted and the next will further elaborate, Beuys produced "props for memory" both because he doubted his immediate impact and because he hoped that the ideas embodied by such objects might one day be resurrected and recognized as cues for action. In other words, he counted on the "deferred temporality of artistic signification," to use Hal Foster's formulation of the belated impact of the avant-garde, to compensate in the future for effects lacking in the present.⁸¹ Politics may have been the medium through which Beuys attempted to communicate his ideas in the 1960s and 70s, but art, the sort bounded by the obdurate material object, would be the vehicle propelling his hope for the transformative power of creativity into the future.

⁸¹ Foster, *Return of the Real*, 8. Foster's neo-avant-garde apologetics, written in direct response to Peter Bürger's outright dismissal of the neo-avant-garde as a mere rehashing of the failed historical avant-gardes, depends in large part on the argument that Dada, Surrealism, and Constructivism were essentially understood for the first time by the neo-avant-garde. His argument borrows from Freudian theories of repetition and trauma, and the notion that "we come to be who we are only in deferred action," quoting psychoanalyst Jean Laplanche (29). He also cites Slavoj Žižek, who has written that Duchamp built "suspended delays, missed encounters, *infra-mince* causalities, repetition, resistance, and reception" into his work, in a sense anticipating or indeed intentionally creating a situation in which the meaning of his work would unfold over time. Thierry de Duve has extended these arguments more recently in a series of essays for *Artforum* built around the premise that "Duchamp put a message in the mail, and ...it had surely arrived by 1962."

Vehicles of Communication

Joseph Beuys began making multiples, usually consisting of small objects released in varying edition sizes, in 1965, at the urging of upstart gallerist and multiples publisher René Block. Having undertaken the production of multiples with a bit of apprehension, Beuys quickly understood their potential as “vehicles of communication” that could disperse much more widely than his singular works.¹ The prospect of extending his reach and impact proved irresistible for an artist who was seeking to propagate a social message. Indeed, Beuys accelerated his publication of multiples as he became more and more invested in political forms following the founding of the German Student Party in 1967. Hard data demonstrates the point: between 1965 and 1970, Beuys created a modest fourteen multiples, some of which were relatively standard editioned prints. In 1970 alone, however, he produced sixteen, and in 1974, as he was busy lecturing internationally, he issued a whopping 61 multiples.²

By the time of Beuys’s death in 1986, he had produced more than 500 multiples published by a range of international galleries and presses. They comprise a mind-boggling array of objects ranging from readymade, to fabricated, to hand-crafted, including but not limited to:

¹ The “vehicular” quality of the multiples is first mentioned in Beuys’s interview for the 1970 edition of the multiples catalogue raisonné, and it has become the foremost term applied to these objects when they are mentioned in scholarly writings (usually because *Sled* is discussed as an iconic, exemplary multiple, and it is indeed a literal vehicle). In conversation, Jörg Schellmann also referred to the multiples as vehicles in a slightly different sense: he recounted how Beuys liked the fact that small objects like multiples, because they could go anywhere, would naturally mingle in a collector’s home with other objects and ideas. Interview with the author, December 4, 2013.

² I am grateful to my master’s advisor, Charles W. Haxthausen, for graciously compiling these numbers when he provided feedback on an earlier version of this text.

postcards, prints, signed magazines, used wrapping paper, empty wooden boxes, bottles filled with rancid water, bits of fat, films in canisters, rotting fish bones, cut squares of felt, paper smeared with chocolate, brooms and shovels, voting cards, packets of gravy, and felt suits too large (and itchy) to wear. Beuys worked directly with a number of collectors to help them assemble complete sets of multiples, often informing them of new editions as they were released and even sending artist's proofs in the cases of especially popular multiples, ensuring that his most ardent supporters would not miss out.³ Early on, Beuys also agreed to help dealers Jörg Schellmann and Bernd Klüser to compile a multiples catalogue raisonné, with the first edition appearing in 1970 and subsequent revised and expanded editions, in English and German, published several times since.

Despite the evident importance of multiples as a “work block” (to use Beuys's term) alongside his drawings, monumental sculptures, installations, vitrines, and *Aktionen*, little scholarship has been conducted on the multiples outside of the catalogue raisonné, which omits certain objects and contains misleading information about others. There has been a renewed interest in the multiples in the last several years, most notably a transatlantic research project between the Busch-Reisinger Museum and the Pinakothek der Moderne, each of which own a nearly complete set of multiples. By and large, however, multiples—both those by Beuys and

³ In a draft press release written in September 1983, collector Günther Ulbricht, who was then trying to negotiate the sale of his complete set of Beuys multiples to the Kunstmuseum Bonn, writes of Beuys's complicity in compiling his collection. In advocating for the sale, Ulbricht writes that Beuys believed it was important for the multiples to stay together, evidenced in part by his gifting to the Ulbrichts of certain *Belegexempläre* (artist's proofs or other exemplars outside of the edition) in order to ensure that their set of multiples would be complete. Günther Ulbricht papers, file E002_XVII_004 (II Presse-Ausschnitte - Unsere Ausstellungen ab 9.2.1982, 1946 - 1984), Zentralarchiv des internationalen Kunsthandels, Cologne. Beuys also agreed to help the Kunstmuseum maintain a complete set after the sale, as stipulated in the contract signed by all three parties. See “Contract between Beuys and the Stadt Bonn,” dated 1985. (An earlier version in the same file is dated 1983.) Joseph-Beuys-Archiv, Museum Schloss Moyland, Bedburg-Hau, Inv.-Nr. JBA-B-003609

those by other artists of his time—are treated like supplementary art objects, always auxiliary to larger projects and concerns and never the main avenue by which we might understand an artist’s practice.

As I contend throughout this chapter, Beuys’s multiples are objects worth investigating in and of themselves, for while Beuys believed they propagandized aspects of his aesthetic ideology, they also exceeded and in some cases mitigated authorial intention—and in no small part due to what the form of the multiple affords. Let us begin with a multiple René Block published in 1971. Though not as iconic as Beuys’s *Felt Suit* or *Sled* (both of which Block also released), it opens up many of the potentialities of the multiple that I find most compelling. Block had asked Beuys to contribute to a multi-author compilation, consisting of large-scale prints by six other artists, including Wolf Vostell, KP Brehmer, and Sigmar Polke, all contained within a thin, unwieldy black carrying case that resembled a suitcase (Fig. 2.1). As Block recounted for me, he told Beuys that the edition was to be called *Weekend*, and Beuys immediately retorted, “What could I make? I know no weekend.”⁴ He nevertheless agreed to contribute, but made his work, titled *Ich kenne kein Weekend*, distinct from the stack of prints. Beuys’s multiple consisted of two objects that would be affixed to the interior of the case’s lid, namely a small bottle of Maggi liquid seasoning and a copy of Immanuel Kant’s philosophical text *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason), stamped in red with the phrase, “BEUYS: ich kenne kein Weekend” (Fig. 2.2). Humorously paired as if equivalent necessities packed for a trip, the two commodities share one defining feature: iconic design that reads as undeniably German. From its founding in the nineteenth century, Reclam Verlag, which published the Kant volume chosen by Beuys, envisioned its body of publications as a *Universal-*

⁴ René Block, interview with the author, March 7, 2014. The interview was conducted in German; Block reported Beuys’s words as, “Was kann ich machen? Ich kenne kein Weekend,” my translation.

Bibliothek, or universal library, encapsulating all of the world's knowledge that had fallen out of copyright; their little yellow books were—and still are—instantly recognizable as part of Reclam's series of important German texts, which are always printed with yellow covers to distinguish them from texts outside of the German-language intellectual tradition. Maggi, the brainchild of Swiss industrial food pioneer Julius Maggi, was equally tied to national identity, and more specifically to the nation's productivity, as it was invented in the late nineteenth century to make cooking easier for women who were working outside of the home in newly opened factories.

As with many works by Beuys, and many multiples in general, *I Know No Weekend* has an inscrutable quality born of simplicity and seeming randomness (what, after all, does Maggi have to do with Beuys's oeuvre?). But Beuys's bottle of MSG-laden flavor-enhancer and stamped pocket copy of Kant do more political work than they initially let on. The stamp that appears on the cover of the book, to start, equates the phrase "Ich kenne kein Weekend" with "BEUYS," articulating with a mere colon the extent to which Beuys's entire ethos, already by 1971, evinced a lack of distinction between the bourgeois binaries of work and leisure, or art and life. The emphasis on Beuys's weekend-less life of labor takes on more specific political meaning in the context of his notion of social sculpture, and its claims for everyone's ability to act towards society's betterment. Jacques Rancière, in formulating what he calls the "aesthetic regime of art," traces the long history of attempts to distinguish aesthetics (or art, or the artistic sphere) from politics, a process he has termed the "distribution of the sensible." "For all time," he writes, "the refusal to consider certain categories of people as political beings has proceeded... [in part through] the simple observation of their material incapacity to occupy the space-time of political things—as Plato put it, artisans have time for nothing but their work. Of course this

‘nothing,’ which they have no time to do, is to be at the people’s assembly. Their ‘absence of time’ is actually a naturalized prohibition written into the very forms of sensory experience.”⁵ Rejecting that prohibition of the artisan from the “people’s assembly,” Beuys also rejects the notion that his work as an artist ought to be distinct from his work as a citizen, and instead insists that that which makes him an artist—his use of creativity—is a faculty available to everyone. “Politics occurs,” Rancière adds, “when those who ‘have no’ time take the time necessary to front up as inhabitants of a common space and demonstrate that their mouths really do emit speech capable of making pronouncements on the common which cannot be reduced to voices signaling pain.”⁶ While Rancière does not quite advocate the kind of relational work Beuys stages, he nevertheless offers here a useful explanation of the paradoxical operations of Beuys’s claim that “everyone is an artist.” The artist, typically prohibited from political speech, uses his voice to say that *everyone* is in fact an artist, which means not that everyone should retreat into the writing of poetry or the making of paintings, but rather that each person must use his creative faculties towards the political end of bettering society.

The issue of time, and temporality more broadly, can also be located in the very materials of *I Know No Weekend*. Having seen exemplars from the multiple in several different collections, I noticed an odd discrepancy: the label on the bottle of Maggi is not consistent across the edition (Fig. 2.3). I asked René Block about the evident differences among the bottles, and he explained that the planned edition of 95 was executed piecemeal (resulting in an edition of only about

⁵ Jacques Rancière, “Aesthetics as Politics,” in *Aesthetics and Its Discontents* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2009), 24.

⁶ Ibid. This “redistribution of places and identities” and “reapportioning of space and times” is what Rancière calls “the distribution of the sensible,” an overarching concept he uses to correct the notion that the aesthetic is somehow distinct from the political or the social. Instead, he argues, aesthetics underlies the distribution of the sensible that in fact generates regimes of identification in the first place.

sixty) over more than fifteen years, largely because he did not have the space to store 95 black cases full of prints and Maggi seasoning.⁷ The Maggi company redesigned the label on its bottles several times in the late 1970s and 1980s, resulting in the inclusion of bottles with different labels over the course of the edition (Fig. 2.4). The form of the readymade, with its externally-determined aesthetic, cross-fertilized with the form of the multiple, with its likelihood of production over time (and by someone other than the artist), yields this exact potential for porousness to the world outside of the object. The route, that is, from the artist's conception to its concrete materialization is not necessarily straightforward, particularly when time intervenes. We can term this porousness openness, or a resistance to totality or finality—all concepts that do political work, especially in mitigating Beuys's propagation of totalizing aesthetic ideology. Given the insistence on identical repetition that defines the form of the multiple, we could also simply name this heterogeneity difference.⁸ It might have been unplanned or even undesired, but difference is a crucial affordance of the form of the multiple, and it, too, is capable of political work.

⁷ René Block, interview with the author, March 7, 2014. Dealer Jörg Schellmann confirmed that it was also typical for his imprint, Schellmann and Klüser, to produce editions in batches rather than all at once, again for logistical issues. He used the multiple *Fingernagel* as an example. The problem was not storage, in that case, but rather that the process of making it, which involved hot butter and wax that Beuys melted onto his own finger, was uncomfortable and tedious, so he was only willing to make them in small batches. The edition, which was mounted onto a page inserted into the ring binder of the earliest version of the multiples catalogue raisonné, took three or four years to complete. Interview with the author, December 4, 2013. Archived correspondence confirms the prolonged manufacture of multiples, including a letter from Schellmann to Beuys requesting more fingernails, dated 1971 or 1972. Joseph-Beuys-Archiv, Inv.-Nr. JBA-B-027268.

⁸ Discrepancies among the Maggi bottles improbably go even further: there is one exemplar of the multiple that is truly singular, namely the copy produced around 1980 for the collector and multiples publisher Wolfgang Feelisch, who requested that Beuys give the book its own special stamp, which is a smaller version of the one used for the rest of the edition. Because of its late date and one-off production, that exemplar also has a Maggi bottle with a label different than all others in the edition. There were exemplars completed after Beuys's death; these bear the stamp of Beuys's estate and a signature from his son, Wenzel Beuys. *I Know No Weekend* is a work that continued being formed well after Beuys died, extending the object's temporality in ways that the traditional artwork typically forecloses.

In the first section of this chapter, I narrate the emergence of the multiple in the late 1950s and analyze how the multiple was understood through the intersecting logics of the Duchampian readymade and the fine art print. I argue that multiples, unlike prints, embrace seriality, repetition, and reproducibility to the extent that such concerns inhere in multiples themselves, radically fracturing the unity and totality of the work of art. The political work that most critics and historians attribute to the multiples is their “democratizing” affordability, but I argue that while many artists avowed such utopian aspirations, in practice multiples fell short of creating new audiences and also failed, most significantly, to undermine the traditional value of uniqueness. The real political work that I understand the multiples to perform is the subject of the remainder of the chapter. I reject the assumption of uniformity across an edition and recuperate the affordance of multiples to engender difference, and I interrogate what results when variability is placed in direct tension with repeatability, especially in Beuys’s engagement with the rubber stamp and unstable materials. I argue that the dialectic of repetition and difference we can locate in the multiples functions as an analogy for reproducibility and aura, a key dynamic in Beuys’s oeuvre that maps further onto the tensions between individualism and collectivity that we see in Beuys’s social-sculpture work. I conclude by arguing that the tensions articulated in the multiples have consequences for Beuys’s self-construction as an author and also for the status of multiples as “vehicles of communication.”

A Little History of the Multiple

With the exception of a few early print editions and a deluxe exhibition catalogue, Beuys produced his first multiples at the urging of the young dealer René Block, who founded the multiples house Edition Block in Berlin in 1966 as the publishing arm of the gallery he had opened two years earlier. Beuys was initially hesitant, believing that reproduction was not the

route his work was meant to take, but Block, energetic and unfailingly deferential, persisted.⁹ Then just twenty-six-years old, Block was making a place for himself in the art world just as multiples were becoming a transnational phenomenon. Multiples as such came into being with the establishment of Daniel Spoerri's publishing house Edition M.A.T. (*Multiplication d'art transformable*) in Paris in 1959. Spoerri, who issued three-dimensional objects by Marcel Duchamp, Dieter Roth, and Jean Tinguely, among others, is credited with coining the term "multiple" to describe them.¹⁰ The multiples released by M.A.T. tended to privilege kineticism and interactivity, prompting owners to play with moveable, rearrangeable parts. In 1963, Spoerri joined forces with Hein Stünke, who, together with his wife Eva, operated the gallery and publishing house Galerie Der Spiegel in Cologne. Stünke had already built workshops for the production of more traditional reproducible art, and expanded the workshops to accommodate the mixed-medium and mass-produced multiples Spoerri had pioneered, eventually taking over Edition M.A.T. altogether (with Swiss artist and designer Karl Gerstner).

From that point onward, new multiples firms opened on both sides of the Atlantic, mirroring the itinerant activities of the European and American artists they were publishing.¹¹ In 1963, George Maciunas, the chairman of the international Fluxus network with which Spoerri and Beuys had been associated, opened his Fluxshop in New York. Single-handedly, he

⁹ "René Block im Gespräch mit Günter Herzog am 25.11.2008," *Sediment* 16 (Joseph Beuys - Wir betreten den Kunstmarkt, 2009): 18. Block clarifies further that Beuys had likely only encountered multiples that were chic design objects, and had to be convinced that other sorts of objects could be created.

¹⁰ According to Stephen Bury, Parisian gallerist Denise René copyrighted the term "multiple" in 1966, but to no real effect, as the term was used prolifically and most historians continue to focus attention on the early innovations of Spoerri. Bury, *Artists' Multiples, 1935-2000* (London: Ashgate, 2001), 1.

¹¹ More publishers and galleries dedicated to multiples opened in these years than I can discuss here. For a listing of important examples, see the back matter of Deborah Wye and Wendy Weitman's catalogue *Eye on Europe: Prints, Books & Multiples, 1960 to Now* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2006).

assembled multi-authored multiples he called “Fluxkits” and “Fluxboxes,” containers filled with miniature art objects, games, and instructional works printed on notecards (Figs. 2.5-6).¹²

Reflecting the far-flung locales of Maciunas’s fellow Fluxartists, all Fluxus multiples were intended to be distributed by mail, sold for just a few dollars each. Two years after Maciunas opened shop, Klaus Staeck, a lawyer, artist, and political activist (who eventually became one of Beuys’s closest friends and interlocutors) founded Edition Tangente (now Edition Staeck) in Heidelberg, publishing mostly inexpensive postcards and poster editions. The following year, back in New York, Marian Goodman began Multiples, Inc. prior to opening her eponymous gallery. Also in 1966, Wolfgang Feelisch established the tiny but prolific firm VICE-Versand in the town of Remscheid (less than an hour from both Cologne and Düsseldorf) and dedicated himself to producing small multiples that could be sent by mail. In 1970, Bernd Klüser and Jörg Schellmann, who would compile the catalogue raisonné of Beuys’s multiples, began publishing multiples under the imprint Edition Schellmann & Klüser in Munich; despite their role in documenting Beuys’s production of multiples, Beuys made multiples with all of the aforementioned publishers (save for Maciunas), exercising a promiscuity that might offer one compelling cause of both the radical diversity and incredible volume of his output.

That same year, Spoerri, who had been publishing multiples of foodstuffs with VICE-Versand, established Eat Art Galerie above a restaurant in Düsseldorf he had opened in 1968. The restaurant allowed him to make his *tableaux-pièges* (snare pictures) after every meal, gluing down the remains of dinner parties in a form of found-object assemblage, while the gallery upstairs became a natural outgrowth of the restaurant, releasing and exhibiting multiples crafted out of food, ranging from miniature chocolate sculptures by Dieter Roth and sugar thumbs by

¹² Fluxus multiples are discussed in depth in the second chapter of Natilee Harren, “Objects Without Object: The Artwork in Flux, 1958-1969,” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2013).

César to Spoerri's own *Brotteigobjekte* (Bread Dough Objects), created by baking bread into unusual vessels, including a typewriter and a shoe. The Eat Art multiples did not invite active participation on the part of their buyers, in contrast to many of Spoerri's M.A.T. multiples, but in their quotidian, theoretically edible materials, the Eat Art multiples teased at and denied the consumption they suggested—as did Beuys in his early multiple *Zwei Fräulein mit leuchtendem Brot* (Two Young Women with Shining Bread), which consisted of a chocolate bar, painted over with Beuys's signature pigment (*Braunkreuz*), affixed to two typewritten lists of words (Fig. 2.7). Such food-based multiples, especially as they aged, repelled rather than attracted touch, directly contravening the medium's earlier emphasis on interaction or activation. They instead drew attention to the objects' chemical instability, which contravened the general assumption that artworks are meant to be long-lasting.

The sudden emergence of the multiple in the late 1950s coincided with the post-war rediscovery of Dada, specifically the work of Marcel Duchamp, who was the subject of a major traveling solo exhibition in 1958.¹³ Capitalizing on Duchamp's renewed celebrity, Spoerri asked the artist for 100 copies of his 1935 *Rotorelief* for Edition M.A.T.'s inaugural group of publications (Fig. 2.8), directly tying the new medium to strategies pioneered by the pre-war and interwar avant-gardes.¹⁴ A multiple *avant la lettre*, the *Rotorelief* consisted of a set of revolving cardboard discs connected to small motor; when activated, the discs, which had different silkscreened designs, created a hypnotic effect. The *Rotorelief* was not the only kinetic work Spoerri revived from the dustbins of history: he also worked with Man Ray to release an edition

¹³ Pamela Kort details Duchamp's revival in Europe in the object entry for "...mit Braunkreuz," in *Joseph Beuys: Jeder Griff muß sitzen – Just Hit the Mark, Works from the Speck Collection* (London and New York: Gagosian Gallery, 2003), 102.

¹⁴ Jill Carrick, "L'Optique Moderne: Daniel Spoerri's 'Optical Readymades'," *Art History* 39, no. 4 (Special issue: Material Imagination: Art in Europe, 1946-72, September 2016): 124.

of *Object to be Destroyed*, which had indeed been destroyed by a group of rabble-rousers at the Dada exhibition in Paris in 1957. Spoerri and Ray recreated it in 1964 and named it *Indestructible Object*, creating an edition of 100. The multiple stood in for the lost original and, in its multiplicity, made destroying the object again nearly impossible (Fig. 2.9).

The same year that Spoerri and Ray released *Indestructible Object*, Duchamp, too, resurrected his readymades in the guise of multiples. With a nudge from Milan-based dealer Arturo Schwarz, Duchamp released a handful of his best known readymades, including *Fountain* (1917) and *In Advance of the Broken Arm* (1914), as multiples in modest editions of eight, with four additional “proofs” outside of the numbered editions (Figs. 2.10-11). Most of the “original” readymades (the contradiction in terms notwithstanding) had been lost or destroyed, rendering the multiples reproductions of absent “originals.” Duchamp himself had treated the readymades as utterly replaceable as early as 1915, when he recreated in New York a number of readymades he had selected in Paris; the process was taken up by a third party for the first time in 1961, when Ulf Linde, director of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, created exhibition copies of Duchamp’s readymades and then donated them to the museum.¹⁵ In working together with Schwarz to deliberately link the readymade with the multiple in 1964, Duchamp reminded a multiples-laden art world of one of the key origin points of the multiple’s formal logic (or, alternatively, positioned the multiple as the natural end-point of the readymade’s logic), while also making the form of the multiple a crucial aspect of his post-war reception and legacy.¹⁶

¹⁵ Ann Temkin, “Marcel Duchamp: *In Advance of the Broken Arm* and *Why Not Sneeze Rose Sélavy?*” in *Dada in the Collection of The Museum of Modern Art*, eds. Anne Umland and Adrian Sudhalter with Scott Gerson (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 116.

¹⁶ See Martha Buskirk, “Thoroughly Modern Marcel,” *October* 70 (Fall, 1994): 113-125; and Francis M. Naumann, “Proliferation of the Already Made: Copies, Replicas, and the Works in Edition, 1960-1964,” *Marcel Duchamp: The Art of Making Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproductions* (New York: Harry N.

While the readymade was one important touchpoint for understanding the multiple as a new medium, equally relevant was the seemingly old-fashioned tradition of the fine art print. As multiples were becoming increasingly popular in Germany, two terms used to describe them, *Auflagenobjekte* (editioned objects) and *vervielfältigte Kunst* (reproducible art), nodded to their relationship to limited edition books, fine art prints, and, to a lesser degree, cast sculpture. The logic of the multiple was most clearly tied to printmaking, which uses a substrate and applied pressure (or, in the case of lithography, antipathy between oil and water) to reproduce an image in an edition of identical numbered and signed exemplars.¹⁷ The print tradition also allows for monotyping, for example, which uses (one could say subverts) print technology to create singular works, but the appeal of multiples producers to the language and logic of printmaking was clearly intended to situate multiples as analogues to prints insofar as they embody the principle of reproducibility—a logic of repetition and identity that the multiple could then protract into three dimensions.

The importance of three-dimensionality to the specificity of multiples has diminished over time, and it has become just as common to call both works on paper and sculptural objects multiples, depending on the whims of the artist and his or her commercial interlocutors, as it is to insist that prints and multiples are fundamentally different mediums.¹⁸ Regardless, there is something to be learned from the historical evolution of multiples from fine art prints. William

Abrams, Inc., 1999). Duchamp had also released the *Rotorelief* earlier in 1953 and then again in an edition of 150 in 1965, published by Arturo Schwarz.

¹⁷ Though it now seems entirely natural, the “tradition” of numbering and signing prints was only introduced by James Abbott McNeill Whistler in the nineteenth century as part of a brilliant commercial strategy. See Pat Gilmour, *The Mechanised Image: An Historical Perspective on 20th Century Prints* (London: Arts Council of Great Britain, 1978), 22.

¹⁸ Bury, *Artists' Multiples*, 4.

Ivins, the founding curator of the department of prints at the Metropolitan Museum in New York, once defined a print as “an exactly repeatable pictorial statement... [that] involves the transfer of an image from one surface to another.”¹⁹ Multiples clearly depart from the logic of reproducibility suggested by the latter half of Ivins’ definition, in that there is no originary image that is reproduced. (This “lost original” is part of what makes the multiple appropriate to the moment of its emergence, poised on the precipice of post-modernism.) I would argue, however, that multiples are indeed predicated on the first half, the notion of an exactly repeatable pictorial—or perhaps even visual or tactile—statement.

In the field of printmaking, precise repeatability is an expectation. As long as individual prints are pulled from the plate with the uniformity we would expect of a master printer, the “pictorial statement” is the same from print to print in an edition despite minute differences in plate tone, line quality, or registration.²⁰ Even though the medium of printmaking is predicated on reproducibility, that reproducibility is meant to be separate from the pictorial statement that a single print conveys. If we conceive of multiples as a modernist adaptation of print logic, however, their medium specificity—their “pictorial statement,” to use Ivins’ phrase—becomes, in fact, their very multiplicity. To name a singular object a “multiple” is to imply exactly that:

¹⁹ Gilmour, *The Mechanised Image*, 16.

²⁰ Though these suppositions are accepted on a conceptual level, my own experience in museum print departments has illuminated for me the ways in which the print market and institutional norms still harbor a strong practice of connoisseurship that consistently questions these assumptions. When a print is considered for purchase, for instance, it is expected that the curator will seek out other impressions of the same image for comparison, ultimately in order to confirm that the proposed acquisition is not inferior to others in the edition. Jennifer L. Roberts shares this same lament: “print scholarship has developed a reputation (deservedly or not) for focusing on connoisseurial specificities and deploying models of artistic mastery that support that market context of much print discourse but that have come under question in the most prominent theoretical models of modern and contemporary art.” “The Printerly Art of Jasper Johns,” in *Jasper Johns/In Press: The Crosshatch Works and the Logic of Print* (Cambridge: Harvard Art Museums, 2012), 13.

each singular object partakes in and constitutes a plurality that might not be visible, but that is fundamental to the ontology of each object. Karl Gerstner, an artist and designer who worked with Galerie Der Spiegel to produce the 1964 suite of multiples issued by Daniel Spoerri's Edition M.A.T., succinctly explained this ontological feature: "[Multiples] are not only reproduced, rather they are themselves manifold."²¹ That manifold quality of multiples inheres, conveniently, in the name itself. In calling each object "a multiple," a term that stuck in English, French, and German, one invokes a linguistic oddity that sounds like a contradiction in terms, confirming the object's ontology in the simple act of naming it.

The historical specificity of the multiple further confirms and contextualizes its medium-specificity. Multiples appeared as Abstract Expressionism was finally waning, having dissolved at the end of the 1950s, drip by Pollockian drip, into the multimedia approaches of Neo-Dada and Happenings. This was also the moment in which artists conceived of their work as blurring art and life, thus redoubling the revolutionary calls of the historical avant-garde, as I discussed in the preceding chapter. Across movements of the late 1950s and 60s, into the 70s, the presence of the artist was stripped of its privilege and authorship was dispersed, whether through collaboration (Fluxus), audience intervention (Happenings), industrial production and fabrication (Pop and Minimalism), or the disavowal of the object (Conceptualism and, to some degree, Land Art). Seriality and gestures toward serial production abounded, whether in Jasper Johns's many targets and flags; Andy Warhol's rows upon rows of soup cans; Donald Judd's metal cubes, arranged to give the impression that they could progress endlessly like material goods on a production line; or in Beuys's own monumental stacks of uniformly cut felt capped with thick

²¹ Qtd. in Willi Bongard, "Große Kunst zu kleinen Preisen," *Die Zeit*, February 16, 1968, <http://www.zeit.de/1968/07/grosse-kunst-zu-kleinen-preisen/komplettansicht>. The original German reads, "Sie sind nicht nur vervielfältigt, sondern in sich selber vielfältig," my translation.

metal sheets. The factory line and the store shelf, the alpha and omega of capitalist consumption, indeed provided key metaphors for post-war experiments with seriality, and the multiple fell perfectly in step with attempts to mimic—for the sake of valorization or critique—the form of the commodity. That also brings us squarely back to the legacy of Duchamp and the readymade, which was not only industrially produced, but ascended to the status of art through the artist’s “selection” of it—which is to say, Duchamp went shopping and picked one commodity over another, much as the average consumer does every day. In a similar fashion, Conceptual art opened onto repeatability with its “delegatory ethos,”²² as artists such as Sol LeWitt, arguing that the making of a work is a “perfunctory affair” relative to the idea that informs it,²³ sold instructions for wall drawings that were to be executed by others and could conceivably be executed more than once and in more than one place, with no damage done to the integrity of the work.

In a slightly different guise, seriality cropped up as repetition and accumulation, whether in the phallic protuberances of Yayoi Kusama’s sculptures and environments (or the mise-en-abyme of her infinity rooms) or in Warhol’s screenprints, which engaged seriality variously within the confines of a single canvas (as in his *Electric Chair* series) and across several at once (most famously with his soup cans). Fluxus scores enabled performances to be repeated without end, and also often thematized repetition as a structuring principle of performance, as in George Brecht’s *Drip Music* (1959-62), which brought art closer to the everyday while also defamiliarizing it. On Kawara’s date paintings, collectively titled *Today*, highlighted the paradoxical presentism and déjà-vu of strategies of repetition. Given the increasing emphases on

²² Roberts, “The Printerly Art,” 35.

²³ Sol LeWitt, “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art,” *Artforum* 5, no. 10 (Summer 1967): 79.

seriality, repetition, and reproducibility seeded in the late 1950s and in resplendent bloom by the early 1960s, it is unsurprising that Jasper Johns and Robert Rauschenberg—critical bridges between Abstract Expressionism and the neo-avant-garde—became accomplished and prolific printmakers, often testing out strategies in print that would later appear in paintings and sculptures, or using print mediums to bring thematic references to reproducibility made in their non-print work to fullest fruition.²⁴

Broadly speaking, seriality has many different effects or charges: it mirrors the repetition and banality of the commodity form and industrial manufacture, as well as that of the mass media and everyday activities naturalized through mindless repetition. Whether occurring within the space of a single canvas or sculpture, or spread across numerous parts that cohere as one work, serial gestures also serve to fracture the unity of the work of art. Seriality divides the work into a typically arbitrary number of parts and creates a literal and figurative openness and embrace of randomness aligned with the neo-avant-garde's questioning of authorship and genius. Multiples further exacerbated that implosion of the work's *Gestalt* (to use a word Rosalind Krauss often deploys) by subdividing the work into a set of units, each of which, somewhat paradoxically, are meant to allude to the fact that they belong to a plurality *while also* communicating the entire statement of the work in the absence of the other units.

The secondary fracturing of the unity of the work that I have characterized as central to the medium of the multiple went hand in hand with the distinctly political rhetoric that framed its emergence and remained crucial to its marketing. Multiples were touted as embodying a new form of egalitarian, “democratic” distribution and circulation, a quality—or aspiration—that has

²⁴ See Roberts, “The Printerly Art.”

inherited in the term multiple itself.²⁵ In a representative example of this claim, Maria Gough writes, “Accordingly priced, the promise of the multiple was a vast expansion in the very possibility of ownership: every man his own art collector, in short. In this way, each multiple signified a small utopia.”²⁶ The utopian aims of the multiple recalled the work of the Weimar-era Bauhaus, which also espoused a model of social change generated through the distribution of goods for sale. One of the goals of the Bauhaus was to create designs for simple household objects that would facilitate better living. But the aim of the Bauhaus was even more ambitious than incremental changes to daily life: Bauhaus artists desired to generate a utopia, a “cathedral of socialism” or a *Gesamtkunstwerk* in which art, craft, and daily life could be united as they had been in the Gothic cathedral of Germany’s past. The Bauhaus was deeply connected with ideas borrowed and remixed from earlier movements, including Art Nouveau, the Wiener Werkstätte, and the British Arts and Crafts movement, all of which aimed at improving society through good design (which meant, of course, something different in formal and ideological terms for each group). The Bauhaus thus provided a crucial historical model for how one might merge the aesthetic and the political through the commodity-form.²⁷

²⁵ Democratized distribution is central in the tentative definition of the multiple offered in Daniel Buchholz and Gregorio Magnani, “Introduction,” *International Index of Multiples from Duchamp to the Present*, 7-12 (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 1993). It is a recurring theme in the newsletters published by the Genova-based Galleria del Deposito between 1963 and 1969, and also in the essays that comprise the exhibition catalogue *The Small Utopia: Ars Multiplicata*, ed. Germano Celant (Milan: Fondazione Prada, 2012).

²⁶ Maria Gough, “The Art of Production,” in *The Small Utopia*, 32.

²⁷ For a discussion of the Bauhaus commodity, see Robin Schuldenfrei, “The Irreproducibility of the Bauhaus Object,” in *Bauhaus Construct: Fashioning Identity, Discourse and Modernism*, eds. Jeffrey Saletnik and Robin Schuldenfrei, 37-60 (New York: Routledge, 2009); and Frederic J. Schwartz, “Utopia for Sale: The Bauhaus and Weimar Germany’s Consumer Culture,” in *Bauhaus Culture: From Weimar to the Cold War*, ed. Kathleen James-Chakraborty, 115-138 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Russian Constructivists also believed in the everyday object as a tool of revolution, but not in the same sense as Western counterparts working within a capitalist framework. For a discussion of the Russian model, in which the work of art and design occupies the role of “object-as-comrade,” see

The rhetoric that swirled around the multiple was not, however, without its contradictions and complications, which track directly onto the diversity of artistic positions in the late 50s and 60s. Two such contradictions bear discussion. First, although many producers of multiples claimed to want to reach new audiences by creating less expensive, reproducible works, the multiple, like the unique work, was consumed primarily by the elite. Several dealers, including Jörg Schellmann and René Block, confirmed in conversation that the people who bought multiples from their galleries were, by and large, the same customers who bought more expensive singular works of art, alongside art students and artists who could not normally afford unique works. While artists thought that objects scaled to quotidian experience, often incorporating readymade domestic items, would bring art closer to life, it seems that members of the general public—those who were not already inclined to collect art—were disinterested in spending even a few dollars to own a pocket-sized serially produced artwork that tended to lack the character, refinement, and monumentality of the singular works they could see in museums.²⁸ The nature of the multiple turns ownership into a “we,” but this shared identity is not so radical in the end: the “we” is still, for the most part, a privileged “we,” an art-going, bourgeois community of collectors and enthusiasts. The neo-avant-garde did not create a new audience for

Christina Kiaer, *Imagine No Possessions: The Socialist Objects of Russian Constructivism* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

²⁸ I recently came across an anecdote in unrelated archival research that clarifies this exact problematic. In an interview in 1977, art historian and curator Ellen Johnson recounts the following episode from a studio visit in the early 1960s with Claes Oldenburg. Johnson asked Oldenburg if he was planning to imitate the look of a store on the Lower East Side because he desired “an ordinary bowery bum to come in off the street and like your work?” Oldenburg replies, “I’d love that.” Johnson quickly disabuses him of that notion: “...but you know perfectly well that isn’t what happens. They look in and try to figure out what is that crazy man doing when they walk by.” Oldenburg was forced to admit blankly, “yes, that’s what happens.” Richard Spear, “Tradition and Revolution: An Interview with Ellen Johnson,” *Oberlin Alumni Magazine*, May/June 1977, 2-8.

art by bringing art into greater communion with everyday life; instead, such moves served, if anything, to alienate the nonart public as much as it appealed to them.

Not only did multiples fail to create new audiences, more importantly, perhaps, they also ultimately failed to undermine the purchase of uniqueness in the discourse of art and art history. Multiples were allowed to be less expensive and thus (theoretically) within reach of the “average person” only because the art world had in fact not entirely relinquished its fetishization of aura, the touch of the artist’s hand that mythically endowed the unique work with much of its inflated material value. So while developments in post-war art allowed for the appearance and acceptance of new forms of reproduction, such forms were only permitted to be inexpensive by virtue of an unspoken, communal acknowledgement that the unique work still had something of value that the editioned work did not. The generally accepted narrative of late 50s and early 60s practices links the Neo-Dada investment in printmaking to “the devaluation of originality and... [the] traumatic repression of the expressive, heteronormative, self-determining subject”—in other words a rejection of everything Abstract Expressionism held dear.²⁹ While that was no doubt the explicit position of many post-AbEx artists, countless entreaties against aura and in favor of technologically-mediated or deskilled production nevertheless did not succeed in banishing the values of aura, originality, singularity, and genius from the art world, which remained beholden to the market. As I argue in what follows, those values were also manifest in multiples themselves and not just in the conditions that bred and sustained them. As objects often made by human hands, multiples are, in fact, rarely identical across an edition, allowing difference to infiltrate and fracture the work of art and the subjectivity of its author beyond what has ever been claimed for the medium—with particularly interesting consequences for an artist like Beuys,

²⁹ Roberts, “The Printerly Art,” 17.

who wrestled with difference and repetition as an allegory for aura and reproducibility, and more generally, individualism and collectivity. This, rather than “democracy” through cheapness and ubiquity, is the political work that the multiple truly affords.

Repetition and Difference

The importance of Duchamp for the development of the multiple cannot be overstated, though his legacy was not purely tied to the innovation of the readymade. We know now that Duchamp’s recusal from art-making in the 1920s had been something of a ruse. While he claimed to have retired from art to play chess, he eventually busied himself constructing the work that came to be known as the *Boîte-en-valise* (Box in a Suitcase), a miniature museum of his artworks that would serve to cement his contributions to twentieth-century art and distribute them more widely, in a format that itself thematized travel and circulation (Fig. 2.12). Presaging the emergence of the multiple proper, the *Boîte-en-valise* was first issued in a small edition of twenty in 1941 and then re-created in six further editions in the 1950s and 60s (minus the suitcase, which by then seemed superfluous). As Martha Buskirk has noted, the *Boîte* is a form of contradictions: alongside photographic reproductions of two-dimensional works (echoing André Malraux’s *musée imaginaire*³⁰), the editioned objects in the valise were painstakingly created by hand or specially manufactured, displacing the found-object status of the readymade.³¹ To complicate matters further, each of the first twenty valises included an

³⁰ Rosalind Krauss draws this connection in the roundtable discussion “Conceptual Art and the Reception of Duchamp” [1994], in *The Duchamp Effect*, eds. Martha Buskirk and Mignon Nixon (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996): 216. Malraux’s book was published in 1947, but the ideas that informed it appeared in *Verve* magazine, beginning with its first issue in 1937. See also Hannah Feldman, *From a Nation Torn: Decolonizing Art and Representation in France, 1945-1962* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014).

³¹ See Buskirk, “Thoroughly Modern Marcel.”

“original” artwork, not only drawing attention to the reproduction of the rest of the contents but also rendering the exemplars of the edition dissimilar; in maintaining that the work was nevertheless an edition, however, Duchamp seemed to render the originals interchangeable, thus lowering them to the mere status of commodity, right alongside his multiples. The originals went even further in developing tension between competing values: in the version of the valise now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, Duchamp included a drawing of the top half of the *Large Glass*—in effect plagiarizing a “readymade” image as the basis for the drawing, flipping the question of originality back on itself. In sum, the *Boîte* was less an unfettered celebration of reproducibility than a clever meditation on the irresolvable conflict between reproducibility and aura as opposing poles of aesthetic logic.³²

Despite—or perhaps because—Beuys took up multiples as a serious part of his artistic production, his work remained invested in aura and presence, even when it was predicated on a kind of manufactured repeatability that eschewed the artist’s hand. The rhetoric propagated throughout the 1960s and 70s implied uniformity across the exemplars of an edition of multiples: if every object were identical, then everyone, whether rich or poor, art savvy or amateur, would own the exact same thing for the same low price. The presentation of multiples in exhibitions and catalogues from the 1960s onward have tended to attribute sameness simply by neglecting to

³² Jennifer Roberts generalizes this problem in “The Printerly Art”: “Print is rightly associated with dematerialization; its role in repetition, translation, and standardization yokes it to rationalization and the erosion of material uniqueness, and its entanglement with mechanical and collective production implies the retreat or removal of the individual bodily processes of makers. But at the same time, printing is an intensely physical, forceful process. Its transfers and replications rely on pressing, squeezing, rolling, smearing, and various species of oozy surface contact. These contacts, in turn, produce spatial artifacts and events that infiltrate the material world and implicate the human body in particular ways” (9). She concludes, “print is a crucial site for negotiating the status of corporeal life in the information age of the late twentieth century” (10). Just as Roberts has forcefully challenged the rhetoric of print that prioritizes mechanization and impersonality over difference and corporeality, so must we also take to task the claims made for the multiple, a form which in fact allows—even encourages—difference while at the same time maintaining claims of identity.

show more than one exemplar from any given edition. With precious few exceptions,³³ multiples have been displayed as singular objects, with one exemplar forced to stand in metonymically for the whole edition. Many museums and galleries also choose not to list the edition size on the object label, nor even the fact that the work is a multiple, rendering multiplicity a negligible—or at least invisible—aspect of these works. Institutions thereby directly conceal the multiple’s historically specific rejection of uniqueness, and, more insidiously, preserve the appearance of singularity that has traditionally guaranteed value and prestige, which in turn legitimates the art institution as the safe haven for works of cultural import.

All of these tendencies have made it difficult to discuss or account for the fact that many multiples actually embrace difference, whether by incorporating similar but distinguishable hand touches, or through the use of unstable materials that age divergently over time. The acknowledgement of difference, however, was present from the very start: in a review of the 1968 exhibition *Ars multiplicata* at the Wallraf-Richartz Museum in Cologne, one of the first shows to offer a retrospective view (and validation) of multiples, Willi Bongard describes in

³³ Two recent exhibitions offer important counterpoints to this emphasis on the singular in displays of multiples. *The Small Utopia / Ars Multiplicata*, curated by Germano Celant for the Prada Fondazione’s Ca’ Corner della Regina, Venice, July 6–November 25, 2012, featured numerous exemplars from many of the editions included in the show, both as an illustration of the object’s ordinary multiplicity, and, in some cases, as evidence of differences among exemplars (whether from the moment of their production or acquired over time). Celant showed several of Duchamp’s readymades-turned-multiples in duplicate; three iterations of Edward Kienholz’s car door, *Sawdy*, 1971–72; a whole shelf full of Spoerri’s jars of foodstuffs; three of Beuys’s *Felt Suit*, hung side by side on the wall; four *Sleds* in a giant vitrine; and a line-up of numerous *Intuition* boxes. The exhibition *wait, later this will be nothing: editions by dieter roth*, curated by Sarah Suzuki at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, February 17–June 24, 2013, performed a similar gesture. In addition to including a handful of versions of Roth’s *Literaturwurst*, consisting of shredded books, gelatin, fat, and spices stuffed into sausage casing, made between 1961 and 1970, Suzuki also featured several exemplars from Roth’s edition *Taschenzimmer* (Pocket Room), which consists of a banana slice on stamped paper, encased in a small box the size of a playing card, with a clear plastic top that enables one to see the banana slice (or what remains of it) without opening the box. As the display made manifest, each exemplar has aged differently, with some bananas turned to mere splotches of mold and others improbably intact, almost petrified. Were one to encounter only a single exemplar, the notion of disparate change over time would not be evident as an integral element of the edition, materially and hermeneutically.

detail the early multiple Arman created for Spoerri's Edition M.A.T. It consisted of found trash entombed in a Plexiglas box, each exemplar being slightly different because the garbage itself was not identical.³⁴ Though dissimilarity was at hand from the beginning of the multiple's public reception, it has not been theorized as a fundamental structuring principle of the medium. Rather than treat the multiple's lack of fidelity to its supposed medium specificity and attendant egalitarian ethos as an inconvenient detail, I propose that we investigate instead what it means when exemplars in an edition of multiples are *almost* the same but not quite, when they put variability in direct tension with repeatability. While Beuys never explicitly questioned or undermined the multiple's claim to sameness, he often allowed difference to seep into his multiples, in ways both foreseeable and surprising. Annette Michelson once characterized Beuys's pontifications as having "a kind of consistency within inconsistency,"³⁵ a phenomenon seen most clearly across his body of multiples. That pointed inconsistency within a medium that relies on consistency—on exactness, even—materially illustrates the irreconcilable duality of expressive subjectivity and empowering democracy in Beuys's approach to social sculpture.³⁶ The conflict between his emphasis on biography (which also manifests as a cult of personality or construction of authority) and his proclamations that "every man is an artist" capable of exercising individual freedom for social change can be generalized as the conflict between the individual and his society. That, I argue, is the tension at the center of Beuys's approach to the

³⁴ Bongard, "Große Kunst zu kleinen Preisen," n.p.

³⁵ Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, and Annette Michelson, "Joseph Beuys at the Guggenheim," *October* 12 (Spring 1980): 10.

³⁶ Though of course he does not apply such thinking to Beuys, Benjamin Buchloh generalizes this tension between "individual aesthetic creation" and "collective social production" as the central contradiction that sculpture since Rodin has aimed to resolve. "Michael Asher and the Conclusions of Modernist Sculpture," in Chantal Pontbriand, ed., *Performance, Text(e)s & Documents* (Montreal: Parachute), 58.

multiple, which takes form as a conflict between repetition and difference, and also between the singular and the plural, the reproducible and the auratic, and the rational and the aesthetic, to borrow the terms of Beuys's early "expanded notion of art." Beuys was by no means the only multiples producer to engage the space between repeatability and uniqueness, but that space does specific political work in his oeuvre: namely, it underscores the problematics of social sculpture vis-à-vis Beuys's various positions of authority.

The tensions between reproducibility and aura in Beuys's multiples can be traced back to his first forays into rubber stamping. In the late 1950s, he had fabricated a stamp with the word "Hauptstrom" (main stream) written between a set of Latin quotation marks (<< >>), arranged in an arc within a circle defined by a thin line (Fig. 2.13). The word is accompanied by a set of tiny symbols: a Celtic cross, an arrow, an elongated "U" that resembles a horseshoe magnet or a tuning fork, a set of dots (perhaps a floating umlaut), and the female gender symbol with a dot in the center of the circle. In brief, the notion of a "main stream" combined with symbols for energy, gender, and directionality speak to Beuys's interests in electrical charge, warmth, and change over time, all of which informed his homeopathic tendencies and desire to conjoin art with earlier forms of scientific knowledge. The assortment of mystical symbols, certainly incomprehensible to any viewer at the outset of Beuys's career, contrasts sharply with the bureaucratic form of the stamp. The inaccessible literary quality of the stamp belies the dryness of its form, an internal tension thrown into greater relief through Beuys's application of the stamp to what one might consider his most auratic early works—intimate, direct, often gestural drawings (Fig. 2.14-15). With its precise lines and inherent potential for near-exact reproducibility, the stamp utterly disrupts the expressive power of Beuys's drawings, taking us out of their fictionalized world of sketchily drawn characters and abstract shapes and hinting

instead at a broader ideological or institutional context or program of meaning. When applied to many drawings, the stamp also serves to link together a highly diverse set of works, many of them otherwise incidental and bordering on illegible.

The stamp comes into full effect in Beuys's work in 1967, the year he established the German Student Party. As his master student Johannes Stüttgen describes in a comprehensive account of that period in Beuys's class at the Kunstakademie, Beuys came to him one day at the start of the semester following the founding of the party to announce that they needed to make a rubber stamp with the party's (then nonexistent) insignia. Beuys quickly drew a design, too quickly and precisely, Stüttgen notes, for it to have been a sudden idea (Fig. 2.16). Stüttgen took the design to a local fabricator and had three stamps made, two of which he retained and the third he gave to Beuys. The first item they stamped was the typewritten minutes of the founding of the German Student Party, but from then on, any bit of ephemera was fair game (Fig. 2.17). Stüttgen nostalgically calls this Beuys's "stamp mania" (*Stempelmanie*), a long period during which Beuys and a group of students, including Stüttgen, gleefully stamped whatever they could get their hands on, branding any and all substrates with the sign of the German Student Party. (Beuys joked that they should stamp a bridge over the Rhine.) Smacking of German bureaucratic efficiency, the stamp enabled a kind of Duchampian gesture, allowing Beuys to treat ephemera and other objects as Duchamp had treated his readymade urinal—as ordinary substrates that, when signed by the artist, transformed through the declaration of the signature into works of art. Beuys's persistent branding served to extend the reach of his political organizations by advertising his various associations on incidental objects that, by virtue of his stamp or signature, were rendered art objects. Otherwise disposable souvenirs or pamphlets could become, through

the artist's minor intervention, objects with an imperative toward preservation—objects, in other words, that could one day function as “props for memory,” as I argued in Chapter 1.

Beuys's embrace of the stamp aligned with a contemporaneous engagement with the stamp as a sign of reproducibility, an attractive feature for post-war artists interested in the stuff of the everyday, in serial procedures, and in deskilled artistic production. The stamp appears as a motif in many early multiples, including Dieter Roth's 1968 *Stempelkasten* (Rubber Stamp Box), which gives the purchaser of the multiple the opportunity to write poems in a blank booklet using the included stamps (Fig. 2.18). Arman's 1970 multiple *Accumulation* multiplies the sign of the stamp ad infinitum, perfectly combining the aesthetic of his *poubelles* with the medium-specificity of the multiple (Fig. 2.19).³⁷ Roth, Arman, and others were interested in the stamp as an object from daily life and one that, as it could theoretically be used by anyone, undermined the priority of authorship. Beuys, however, used the stamp for different purposes, relying on a twist of the stamp's implied meaning. Even in his application of the Hauptstrom stamp in drawings from the 1950s, the stamp is meant to play against the auratic image, but not always as its pure opposite. In *Nordlicht* (Northern Light), for example, the ink was applied to the stamp thickly, creating smudging around some of the delicate details of the symbols, giving the overall motif a darker quality with diminished legibility (Fig. 2.20). In Stüttgen's recollections of Beuys's *Stempelmanie*, he reports that Beuys often enthusiastically took up the post of stamper when he and his students assembled materials of the German Student Party. Though the stamp might outwardly signal reproducibility, for Beuys, the act of applying stamp to substrate, though

³⁷ The close resemblance of *Accumulation* to Beuys's 1968 multiple *Intuition*, also published by VICE-Versand and discussed in Chapter 1, is likely not coincidental. Where Beuys leaves his wooden box blank, save for two drawn lines under the word “Intuition,” Arman fills it with stamps of the word “Accumulation.” Beuys's box is empty, meant to be filled with one's intuitive thoughts, but Arman's box is also, in a sense, empty, filled only with the repeated sign of repetition itself.

not a substitute for signing it, was as invested with the weight of authorship as any other productive artistic act. As a kind of branding, the stamp, when applied to Beuys's diverse body of multiples, served the same purpose it did for his early drawings: it linked seemingly divergent works together and implied a connection to a broader program of meaning.³⁸ Lacking a "signature," unifying style, the multiples could nevertheless be joined together by the stamp, an alternative sign of authorship, thus rendering differences generated through application not necessarily moot, but certainly tertiary to the stamp's inherent, overriding sign of reproducibility, which is a signal that one object belongs to a community of like objects.

Difference emerges elsewhere in Beuys's multiples with even greater significance. One of Beuys's earliest and best-known multiples, *Schlitten* (Sled), was made in an edition of 50 in 1969 and consists of a store-bought wooden sled (stamped with "Beuys" and a Celtic cross), felt blanket, flashlight, and wedge of beef tallow tied to the sled with a ribbon (Figs. 2.21-.22). Beuys's use of felt and tallow, on a literary level, related to Beuys's miraculous (fictionalized) rescue from a plane crash at the hands of Tatars, who wrapped his injured body in fat and felt to heal it, but also to Beuys's belief in transformative energies exuded by organic materials in flux. As he put it, "The nature of my sculpture is not fixed and finished. Processes continue in most of them: chemical reactions, fermentations, color changes, decay, drying up. Everything is in a state of change."³⁹ Beuys's dedication to the principle of entropy radicalized contemporaneous

³⁸ Maja Wismer notes, inversely, that "a unifying aesthetic is absent even though his recurring handwritten signature and iconic stamps unmistakably profess his authorship," in "One of Many: The Multiples of Joseph Beuys," in *Art Expanded, 1958-1978*, eds. Eric Crosby with Liz Glass. Vol. 2 of *Living Collections Catalogue* (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 2015), last accessed September 14, 2017, www.walkerart.org/collections/publications/art-expanded/one-of-many-joseph-beuys.

³⁹ Qtd. in Carin Kuoni, ed., *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), 19.

process art, leaving not just the traces of production visible, but allowing materials to change, sometimes dramatically, after the period of production seemed long over.

Two examples of related works from the 1969 exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form* illustrate conceptual and material differences between Beuys's approach to process and that of his contemporaries. In addition to contributing a number of stand-alone sculptural pieces to the show, American artist Richard Serra created a work in an entryway in the Kunsthalle Bern by splashing molten lead along the wall where it met the floor (Fig. 2.23). The lead cooled and hardened in place, like a fossilized record of Serra's action (not unlike the skeins of paint on Pollock's drip-paintings of the 1950s, which chronicled the movement of his body around the once floor-bound canvases). Nearby, in a small room that also featured three of Claes Oldenburg's fabric sculptures and one of Beuys's small felt stacks, Beuys smeared several kilograms of margarine along the floor and partway up the wall, creating a pyramidal length of fat that stopped short of the wall's corner, where Beuys had smeared yet more fat, both into the corner on the floor and higher up on the wall, where the margarine floated in utter defiance of gravity (Fig. 2.24). (At a glance, the margarine looked like it had crept along the floor and up the wall, or vice-versa.) The margarine remained suspended for the duration of the exhibition between liquid and solid states, depending on the temperature of the gallery. This was not the first *Fettecke* (Fat Corner) Beuys had installed, and he knew well that the material—whether margarine, butter, or beef tallow, all of which he had used—would be visibly unstable, in sharp contrast with the hardened lead of Serra's *Splash Piece*, which offered evidence of process but solidified completely once that process of making had concluded. The ambivalence towards the permanence of art effected by Beuys's work was further heightened in the context of the other works in the gallery he occupied. An audio player sitting on the floor near the fat piece played

Beuys's droning audio track, titled *Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee* (Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, no, no, no, no, no). Beuys, alongside Henning Christiansen and Johannes Stüttgen, recites the “ja” and “nee” of the track's title over and over again like a mantra, sporadically breaking into laughter. If the seriousness of the margarine clogging up the corner of the room had been in question for visitors upon first entering, the giggle-laden audio added to the impression that the artist himself saw the work as a humorous, visceral take on the more austere, muscular gestures to be found throughout the exhibition.

The tallow cone strapped to the slats of Beuys's *Sled*, a multiple released the same year he installed the fat corner in Bern, is also “fugitive,” the term used by conservators to describe materials that age and decay at variable rates, sometimes dissipating altogether, depending on how they are stored. (Some materials, like early plastics, are always fugitive, turning yellow and becoming brittle no matter how they are treated.) I have examined several exemplars of *Sled*, including those in the collections of the Broad Art Museum in Los Angeles and the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, each of which evince this fugitive quality in different ways (Figs. 2.21-22). Recent photographs serve to illustrate how such different rates of aging might impact not only the visual appearance of these objects but also their implied meaning. The Broad's wedge of tallow, once a whiteish-yellow, is now a muddy brown and gives off a slight rancid smell (similar to the tallow that belongs to the sled in the collection of the Busch-Reisinger Museum at Harvard, which is kept in a plastic container to isolate its stench), while the Pinakothek's fat has been much better preserved, with just the faintest scent and a slight sheen of mold that one can only detect from a very close distance. The sleds offer a reminder that wood, too, is an organic material, as one can see clearly that the Broad's sled has taken on a dark patina, especially apparent when compared with the much lighter and finer grained wood of the Pinakothek's sled.

While Beuys no doubt predicted that fat and wood would age to some degree, much of the variability that distinguishes these two sleds is the result not of precise artistic intention but of the care that collectors and museums have taken to preserve the objects—or, as it were, *not* preserve them. Most museum-goers confront only one of these sleds at a time and are not privy to such comparisons or behind-the-scenes knowledge. Not knowing that the Pinakothek sled exists, much less what it looks like, viewers of the Broad sled might well presume that decay itself is an integral conceptual aspect of the work, whereas a viewer of the Pinakothek sled would have no grounds for such an interpretation, confronted instead with a barely aged example. Put simply: the formal differences between these objects allows them to mean different things, even though they are, technically, the very same work of art. They share an author, a title, and a list of material components, but they have aged divergently enough that they telegraph different sets of concerns to their viewers. This conceptual-material juggernaut emerges as the major, largely unspoken, affordance of multiples, particularly those crafted with unstable materials, from the objects produced by Spoerri's Eat Art Galerie to Dieter Roth's *Taschenzimmer* (Pocket Room), a multiple consisting of a banana slice on a stamped piece of paper inside a tiny plastic box, released in an unlimited edition over a number of years, making for a set of objects that have obvious commonalities but highly variable appearances depending on the condition of the banana (Fig. 2.25).

In Beuys's oeuvre, material instability and radical heterogeneity had anthropomorphic resonances. Prior to both *Sled* and *Fat Corner*, Beuys made explicit the connection between fat and the human body. In *Fettstuhl* (Fat Chair), 1963, now in a vitrine in the monumental installation *Block Beuys*, Beuys placed a large wedge of fat on the seat of a chair where otherwise a body might sit (and played up the cognate "*stuhl*" (stool) as a term for excrement),

while in the 1967 performance *Eurasianstab* (Eurasian Staff), he slapped fat behind his knees, creating a temporary wedge that linked his thigh and calf just as his fat corners joined the sides of walls or walls and floors, acting like a plug or bandage (Figs. 2.26-27). *Sled* also invokes the body and the notion of healing, through its combination of ingredients for human survival—a blanket to wrap the body, fat to salve wounds or on which to subsist, a flashlight for seeing through darkness. The multiple is also derived from a larger installation in which sleds were staged in a such a way that they took on anthropomorphic qualities. At the 1969 Kölner Kunstmarkt, where the sleds appeared for the first time in René Block's booth, they were being sold in two formats: they were available as multiples, in an edition of 50, and also as part of one of the largest works at the fair, Beuys's installation *Das Rudel* (The Pack), consisting of twenty-four wooden sleds topped with flashlights, rolled felt blankets, and clumps of fat secured to the sled with ribbon, all descending from the back of a real Volkswagen bus (Fig. 2.28). Beuys had created *The Pack* first, staging it without the Volkswagen in the halls of the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, where it seemed to be a direct reference to the student movement, particularly with its original title, *Die Meute* (The Mob) (Fig. 2.29). Block offered Beuys the bus for the installation of the sleds at the fair, and also suggested that Beuys create additional works around what he called the "Projekt Auto." He wrote to Beuys early that summer and tentatively proposed that he create sketches or perhaps an "*Editionsobjekt*" to accompany the large installation, which Block knew would be intriguing for many but financially out of reach for all but a very few.⁴⁰ *Sled*, priced at 300 Deutschmarks, was indeed extraordinarily affordable relative to *The Pack*, which wound up selling, rather scandalously, for 150,000 Deutschmarks.⁴¹

⁴⁰ The line from the letter reads in full, "Vielleicht ergeben sich aus der Arbeit daran Variationen, Skizzen etc, sodaß es wirklich ein Projekt würde, vielleicht ergibt sich auch daraus ein Editionsobjekt....." Letter from Rene Block to Beuys, June 3, 1969. Joseph-Beuys-Archiv, Inv.-Nr. JBA-B-023718.

As a literal, if impractical, means of transport, *Sled* seems to embody Beuys's conception of the multiple as a "vehicle of communication"—and what it seems to communicate, particularly in the broader context of *The Pack*, is multifold. With its aesthetics of survival, *Sled* points not just to Beuys's plane crash, which he first spoke about publicly around the same time that he produced *Sled*, but also to the urgency Beuys saw in the present political situation, symptomatic for Beuys of the broader decline of human capacities for creativity, empathy, thought, and freedom.

Beuys sometimes used the slogan "unity in diversity" in his lectures, a concept he used to characterize the social polity but that also neatly tracks onto the formal habits of his multiples, which, as we have already seen, embrace difference while also deriving meaning from a conceptual sameness. To theorize this "unity in diversity" that we find in the multiples, I want to turn to French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. In *Being Singular Plural*, Nancy extends Martin Heidegger's notion of *Mitsein*—one of his many compound neologisms, which brings two ideas into the closest communion. *Mitsein* is being-with, the corollary of *Dasein*, or being-there. For Heidegger, man does not just exist; he exists always within a world, never outside of it. And he exists in the world always already with other people. For Nancy, this formulation can be pushed even further. "Heidegger writes, 'Dasein's...understanding of Being already implies the understanding of others.' But this surely does not say enough. The understanding of Being is nothing other than an understanding of others, which means, in every sense, understanding others through 'me' and understanding 'me' through others, the understanding of one another. One could say even more simply that Being is communication."⁴² Nancy, to put it simply, wants to

⁴¹ "René Block im Gespräch mit Günter Herzog," 19.

⁴² Jean-Luc Nancy, "Of Being Singular Plural," in *Being Singular Plural* [1996], trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 28.

make inextricable the concepts of being-with and Being as such, that is, to make the social nature of subjects a necessary element of our conception of subjecthood. For him, there is no “we” without “I,” and no “I” without “we,” contrary to the subordination of one to the other in most Western philosophy. Nancy writes, “Our being-with, as a being-many, is not at all accidental, and it is in no way the secondary and random dispersion of a primordial essence. It forms the proper and necessary status and consistency of originary alterity as such. The plurality of beings is at the foundation of Being.”⁴³

Nancy goes on to invoke an expanded sense of art-making that sounds uncannily like Beuys’s notion that everyone is an artist. “What counts in art,” Nancy writes, “what makes art art (and what makes humans the artists of the world, that is those who expose the world for the world), is neither the ‘beautiful’ nor the ‘sublime’; it is neither ‘purposiveness without purpose’ nor the ‘judgment of taste’; it is neither ‘sensible manifestation’ nor the ‘putting into work of truth’. Undoubtedly, it is all that, but in another way: it is access to the scattered origin in its very scattering; it is the plural touching of the singular origin. This is what ‘the imitation of nature’ has always meant.” For Nancy, nature implies a plurality that exists in contradistinction to the individual’s feeling of singularity, and we could perhaps understand the nature that Beuys imitates in the multiples as a philosophical or theoretical one—human nature, the relations between subjects in the world, the condition of being-singular-plural in which we exist. “Art always has to do with the cosmogony,” Nancy continues, “but it exposes cosmogony for what it is: necessarily plural, diffracted, discreet, a touch of color or tone, an agile turn of phrase or folded mass, a radiance, a scent, a song, or a suspended movement, exactly because it is the birth of a world (and not the construction of a system).”⁴⁴ Multiples are literally plural, which allows

⁴³ Ibid., 12.

them to capture the incidental, incomplete quality that Nancy also posits. They seem to be, by nature of their liminal suspension between singularity and plurality, touches or scents of something larger that one can begin to access by way of this marginal, partial thing. (This is also how Beuys hoped they would function as “props for memory,” as prompting traces of social-sculptural projects past.) The multiples, as a form, reproduce and propagate the ontological co-dependency (the mutual, inextricable interpolation) of beings and Being, what Nancy calls “co-appearance.”

Where Beuys plays up the reproducible quality of the multiple, he points, within individual exemplars of an edition, to their participation in a larger, invisible community, and where signs of difference also appear, Beuys illuminates the fundamental tensions between the singular and the plural that constitute the struggles and potentials of the social. To return to a concrete example, it seems to be no mistake that the sleds Beuys editioned and those that belong to *The Pack* bear subtle differences, from the manufacture of the sleds to the specific manner in which the blanket was rolled and the fat was attached to the slats.⁴⁵ They partake of the same concept and, in their conjoining in the space of Block’s booth at the Kölner Kunstmarkt, the multiple appeared to descend metaphorically from the installation just as the sleds descended from the back of the Volkswagen bus. The subtle differences between the two classes of sleds ensured that they were linked but distinct, modeling the relationship that would come to exist among the sleds that comprised the edition, by virtue of the instability of fat and wood as I have argued above.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 14-15.

⁴⁵ René Block clarified various differences between the two types of sleds, noting that the sleds used for the monumental sculpture were more complex (and expensive) than those used for the edition, though both types were purchased from the same Düsseldorf sporting goods store. Interview with the author, March 7, 2014.

Tensions between multiplicity and singularity are articulated with further implications in multiples where Beuys himself appears as an image, as we see most dramatically in his multiple *3-Tonnen-Edition* (3 Ton Edition), which was issued between 1973 and 1985 (Fig. 2.30). The multiple consists of twenty-two vinyl sheets silkscreened on both sides with reproductions of photographs taken by Lothar Wolleh, showing Beuys installing his work in a major exhibition at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1971.⁴⁶ Wolleh's photographs, which frequently appear in reproduction throughout Beuys's oeuvre, have an expressive quality, often executed with a stark contrast that heightens the blurs of movement he captured in Beuys's performances. In *3 Ton Edition*, Wolleh's photographs were printed on vinyl because they were intended to be compiled into large books and submerged in metal tubs, for an outlandishly ambitious multiple called *Unterwasserbuch* (Underwater Book) (Fig. 2.31). When the plan fell through after only two exemplars had been produced, Klaus Staeck, the multiples publisher who had worked with Beuys on the project, took all of the vinyl sheets to a garage and sporadically asked Beuys, over the course of twelve years, to overpaint and sign various sheets as orders came in. Collectors could buy anything from one sheet to all twenty-two, engendering diversity in the edition from the start.

On individual sheets, Beuys manipulated the images by excising holes (even cutting out his own face) and working them over with heavy applications of *Braunkreuz* (Browncross), his reddish-brown paint, and by inscribing them in pen and pencil with his signature. In some places, the paint is applied with a stamp that joins "BEUYS" with a Celtic cross; in others, the paint articulates the shapes of a sled and a stag, motifs that double the repeat appearances of sleds and

⁴⁶ The title of the multiple refers to the eventual weight of the entire edition, which was never completed. The attempt to give mass—monumental mass—to photographs certainly relates to Beuys's interest in conjoining the sculptural and the photographic. See object entry for *3 Ton Edition* in *Joseph Beuys: The Multiples*.

stags in the photographs that serve as substrates. In *3 Ton Edition*, we see Beuys's interest in Expressionism (both the prewar German and the post-war American varieties) brought to bear on his fraught relationship with photography, a medium he believed to be "cold" and isolating,⁴⁷ but which he nevertheless incorporated into his work as the primary means by which many of his activities had been documented. On the sheets of *3 Ton Edition*, Beuys uses *Braunkreuz*, which looks alternately like ruddy paint, chocolate, henna, and excrement, in one of two ways: either to blanket entire sections of the image in a way that aligns neatly with the photograph, or to add blobs that look like they could be a part of the image, as when he applies a kidney-shaped flourish of *Braunkreuz* to his own hand, making it look like the paint comes directly from his body. We could conclude, crudely, that the overpainting is there to add value to the screenprinted sheets, but the overpainting also produces meaning in conjunction with the photographic image—meaning that would not attain to these works in the absence of painted additions. In a general sense, the paint seems to serve a dual compensatory-signatory function, correcting the absence of Beuys's authorship, as the photographs were taken by someone else, and the absence of his aura—an aura that he implied could not be transmitted through or recorded in "cold" and isolating photographs. Signing copies of photographs and re-issuing them as multiples allowed Beuys to capitalize on images that are *of* him but not *by* him, bringing the image of his performing body back from the public domain into his possession, only to return it to the public, overpainted, with doubled signifiers of his presence—or so it would seem.

Such appropriative gestures would seem to render Beuys both the subject and the author of the work, but it must be noted that Beuys's hand-wrought interventions on the pages of *3 Ton*

⁴⁷ Beuys, qtd. in Christopher Phillips, "Arena: The Chaos of the Unnamed," *Joseph Beuys Arena – where would I have got if I had been intelligent!*, eds. Lynne Cooke and Karen Kelly (New York: Dia Center for the Arts, 1994), 53.

Edition often obscure or deface his image, or poke fun at himself, as when the *Braunkreuz* resembles excrement protruding from his behind. In that regard, such supplements to or erasures of the photographic image hardly effect straightforward affirmations of authorship or aura. Maja Wismer notes in a discussion of one of the motifs from *3 Ton Edition* that it “documents Beuys releasing his work into the public sphere yet again—this time into the sphere of the museum—and positions the work of reinstalling and recontextualizing as an integral part of the artist’s practice.”⁴⁸ The fact that the motifs of *3 Ton Edition* show photographs of a major exhibition in which Beuys participated, in the effort of cementing his own legacy, makes the defacing of his own image potentially more damaging to notions of authorship and authority than it would be otherwise. The presence of the artist in the space of the exhibition is fetishized (as we saw in Chapter 1 with the Office for Direct Democracy), and here Beuys is choosing, in representations of that same space, to efface himself.

This cancellation of the self through the doubling of its signs is more subtle and provisional than that executed by Beuys’s contemporary, Austrian painter Arnulf Rainer. At *documenta 5*, which occurred chronologically between Beuys’s Moderna Museet show and his production of *3 Ton Edition*, Rainer exhibited a number of photographic self-portraits in which he arranged himself, usually nude from the waist up, in contorted poses, sometimes with the aid of a black strap (Fig. 2.32). The portraits are all overpainted with gestural strokes, sometimes obscuring his face and other times emphasizing or underscoring a gesture within the photographic image. He developed the strategy of overpainting in the 1950s as an extension of Art Informel, the European version of Abstract Expressionism that understood gestural painting to be a modernist mode of self-expression. By eventually transferring those lively, aggressive

⁴⁸ Wismer, “One of Many,” n.p.

brushstrokes from blank canvas to the photographic self-portrait in the 1960s, Rainer doubles the commentary on the self that earlier conceptions of painting were intended to effect; insofar as he uses paint to deface himself and make even more violent the act of contortion the image records, he cancels the affirmations of subjectivity that might have been communicated by the portraits or the gestural paint alone.

Rainer also interestingly uses the language of reproducibility to characterize what he is attempting to do. In the catalogue for *documenta 5*, he printed a brief statement under four of his overpainted photographs (Fig. 2.33). “I want to intensively reproduce myself,” he declares. “That, what I was, am, will be. That, what I could be.” He goes on to detail his methods of self-construction, and concludes by clarifying that his works have a communicative purpose: “My work is a personal polemic of the artist, in order to exemplify the opening and widening of the human being.”⁴⁹ Thus, even though Rainer sees his project as highly personal—which his inclusion in the “Individual Mythologies” section of *documenta*, alongside Beuys, seemed to prioritize—he too, like Beuys, desires effects far beyond the individual, and uses signs intimately associated with subjectivity in order to undermine it.

While Rainer’s references to the self are more visceral and palpable than those Beuys employs in *3 Ton Edition*, Beuys’s insistent use of the signature magnifies his interest in signs of authorship and subjectivity. Arguing against J.L. Austin’s notion that performative utterances are predicated on the presence of their speakers,⁵⁰ Jacques Derrida wrote, in the late 1970s, that “by

⁴⁹ “Ich will mich konzentriert reproduzieren. Das, was ich war, bin, werde. Das, was ich sein könnte; ich mache mich dazu. [...] Meine Arbeit ist eine persönliche Polemik des Künstlers, um die Öffnung und Erweiterung der menschlichen Person zu exemplifizieren,” my translation. Arnulf Rainer, “Selbstdarstellung” (Self-Representation), in *documenta 5*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Harald Szeemann (Kassel: Documenta, 1972), 16-67.

⁵⁰ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 60-61.

definition, a written signature implies the actual or empirical nonpresence of the signer. But, it will be claimed, the signature also marks and retains his having-been present in a past *now* or present [*maintenant*] which will remain a future *now* or present [*maintenant*], thus in a general *maintenant*, in the transcendental form of presentness [*maintenance*]. That general *maintenance* is in some way inscribed, pinpointed in the always evident and singular present punctuality of the form of the signature.” He continues, “In order to function, that is, to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. It is its sameness which, by corrupting its identity and its singularity, divides its seal [*sceau*].”⁵¹ Two primary arguments emerge through the thick of Derrida’s musings: first, that what is performative is constituted not in its singularity but in its repeatability, which identifies it as a recognizable ritual of speech (or writing) that commits an action as it is uttered; and second, that the signature necessarily entails or anticipates the lack of physical presence of the author—hence the need for a signature at all.

The signature thus both impresses the author upon a document and virtually ensures his future absence from it, illustrating one of the central paradoxes of Beuys’s multiples, particularly those, like *3 Ton Edition*, that insist on the signature as an integral aspect of the work. The overwhelming presence of Beuys, both as an image and as an author (through the signatures, stamps, and paint), would seem to foreclose interpretive avenues that move us away from the author and his instrumentalization of his own work towards ideological ends. But the paradox laid out by Derrida offers one way in which Beuys’s palpable aura is countered—even neutered—within the work itself. In art historian and critic Jan Verwoert’s critical interpretation of Beuys’s pedagogical methods, he describes Walter Benjamin’s notion of aura as “produced

⁵¹ Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context [1977],” in *Limited Inc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988): 20.

through the simultaneous suggestion of distance and proximity.”⁵² Derrida, using different terms, makes the same claim about the signature: ontologically, it relies upon the absence of the writer to make the text’s continued effectiveness consequential. If we find truth in that idea, then Beuys seems to effect absence quite forcefully through his prolific signature, as one sees in two sheets of *3 Ton Edition* that bear Beuys’s name stamp in triplicate (Fig. 2.34). Why assert oneself—one’s presence, authorship, aura, authority—over and over again in the space of a single image that is also in fact a representation of the self?

The notion that Beuys as a subject is not only present in but constituted through his multiples has long been implied by a certain quotable statement Beuys once made: “When you have all of my multiples, then you have me entirely.” The quote is rarely attributed properly, but my research has confirmed that it can be traced back to an interview with the multiples collector Günther Ulbricht in 1987. Ulbricht recalled Beuys having uttered the statement to him directly; under those circumstances, the statement might indeed have been a playful joke, a tongue-in-cheek jab at Ulbricht’s tireless dedication to gathering each and every Beuys multiple over more than two decades.⁵³ However, given Ulbricht’s propensity for seriousness and self-promotion (which I observed in numerous articles of correspondence in the Joseph-Beuys-Archiv), I suspect he offered this recollection in the interview, especially so soon after Beuys’s passing, as a way of boasting about the unparalleled access to the artist that an owner of all of the multiples (such as himself) would have had. Subsequently, the idea that Beuys’s multiples in aggregate would

⁵² Jan Verwoert, “Class Action,” *frieze* 101 (September 2006), <https://frieze.com/article/class-action>.

⁵³ Katharina Schmidt, “Zur Beuys Stiftung Ulbricht im Kunstmuseum Bonn” [1987], in *Joseph Beuys, Die Multiples* (Bonn: Kunstmuseum, 1992), III. See also Joseph Beuys, qtd. in Peter Nisbet, “In/Tuition: A University Museum Collects Joseph Beuys,” in *Joseph Beuys: The Multiples: A Catalogue Raisonné of Multiples and Prints*, ed. Jörg Schellmann (Munich: Edition Schellmann, 1997), 520.

somehow give us access to him “entirely” has been offered again and again without any questioning of the “me” to which Beuys was supposedly referring. As I have argued here, Beuys played with and subverted the conventions of multiples and the signs of reproducibility that they often bear in ways that trouble that “me,” and place its explicit singularity in tension with its underlying, and often invisible, plurality.

Vehicles of (Mis)Communication

We saw in Chapter 1 the ways in which Beuys sometimes concretized his political action in objects, often multiples, and how he prolifically applied the stamps of his organizations to countless bits of ephemera, thus funneling all sorts of objects toward the effort of propagandizing social sculpture. I argued that objects could be propaganda, yes, but they could also, in their very form as artworks that would carry on into the future, articulate Beuys’s doubt about his effectiveness in the present, creating a bit of space in Beuys’s seemingly unyielding tendencies toward totalizing ideology and exercise of authority. True to the pedagogical aims of the multiples, Beuys often termed himself a “sender” and understood the viewer or collector as a “receiver,” but he undercut the ability of his multiples to serve as vehicles of communication not just by embedding in the work a delayed reception, as I argued in Chapter 1, but also by explicitly thematizing miscommunication and silence. Of the more than sixty postcard editions Beuys issued, for example, a number of his postcards were, in fact, unsendable, rendering such objects the image of transportability rather than actual facilitators of communication. Beuys’s felt, metal, and wood postcards discourage a “sender” from inscribing any message at all, and none of them could travel through the postal system in the fashion of normal postcards. They embody a potential for message-sending that is frustrated by their very material bodies, a poetic

commentary, perhaps, on our own corporeal limitations—or on the limitations of Beuys himself as a sender of messages.

Looking across Beuys's oeuvre, we find significant moments of failed communication outside of the multiples, especially where communication is mediated by forms of—or allusions to—technology. In one of his earliest performances, *wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* (How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare) (1964), Beuys occupied the front window of Düsseldorf's Galerie Schmela and explained the nature of art to a dead hare cradled in his arms (Fig. 0.7-8). As documentary film footage of the event shows, spectators gathered outside but could not hear anything Beuys said, effectively transforming him into a silent moving image and the window into a screen; spectators were allowed to enter the gallery after the performance had ended, Beuys still perched on his chair with his head covered in honey and gold leaf, as incomprehensible as he had been from outside the window. In *Filz-TV* (Felt TV), the performance that Beuys contributed to Gerry Schum's television broadcast *Identifications* in 1970, Beuys sat in front of a television whose screen had been covered with felt, punching himself in the face with a pair of boxing gloves (Figs. 2.35). The television set, deprived of an image, blared a news report about the price of milk in Germany. Beuys's self-abuse compensates for the television's virtuality, and he compensates further for its eschewing of tactility by pressing up to its screen a cut hunk of blood sausage; still dissatisfied, Beuys ends by turning the television towards a wall-bound panel of felt, a material that exuded warmth and healing in the Beuysian cosmology. In 1974, Beuys transformed *Felt TV* into a multiple by the same name, which contained a film reel of the performance, a pair of boxing gloves, a screen-shaped piece of felt, and a desiccated sausage (Fig. 2.36). The felt curiously resembles a dining table placemat, which, together with the commodities news report aligns the television with modes of

consumption, which Beuys's *Felt TV*, itself originally broadcast on television, was meant to disrupt. The items in the multiple were not relics from the performance but rather props for a recreation, a way to "repair" one's own television of its incapacities. Beuys's performance exemplifies his ambivalence towards technology, both adopting the form of the TV show as a vehicle of communication, and using his allotted time to compensate for technology's deficiencies.

Beuys endlessly reconfigured the relationship between his signature materials and mediating technology, challenging the power of his materials—for which he claimed magical alchemical properties—in a way that has never been acknowledged in the critical literature on his work. In the action *Der Chef / The Chief: Fluxus Song*, performed in December 1964, Beuys lay for eight hours on the floor of Galerie Rene Block in Berlin, wrapped entirely in a felt blanket with dead hares emerging from the felt roll at his head and feet (Fig. 0.6).⁵⁴ Beuys broadcast whispers and other noises with the assistance of a microphone—a form of communication only necessary because of the insulating qualities of felt, which made normal speech impossible. Although the sound was magnified, the effect of the felt was left ambiguous, creating the sense that the felt was distorting Beuys's speech (rather than that Beuys was distorting it himself), rendering the material itself responsible for the frustrating incomprehensibility of the performance. A few years later, Beuys used felt to similar effect in the multiple *Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee* (1969), which had been played that year as a soundtrack to Beuys's work in the show *When Attitudes Become Form*. For the edition, Beuys nestled the tape recording of nonsense speech and laughter in a large block of felt with a felt cap, which altogether looked like

⁵⁴ Robert Morris was supposed to perform this *Aktion* simultaneously in New York based on Beuys's detailed instructions, but he did not carry it out. Early texts on Beuys, including the biography written by Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas, imply that Morris held up his end of the work. See "René Block im Gespräch mit Günter Herzog," 13.

a book with a secret compartment in which one hides something (Fig. 2.37). Encased in felt, the recording was materially silenced, a double silencing since the recording already had nothing to communicate. The fact that most owners of the work would never play the recording for fear of damaging the tape ensures the object's silence in perpetuity, frustrating its non-message completely, and challenging the very claims of multiples that supposedly enable or demand interactivity, as in Beuys's *Evervess II I*.

Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee recalls in miniature Beuys's 1966 sculpture *Infiltration Homogen für Konzertflügel* (Homogenous Infiltration for Piano), which consists of a full-sized grand piano blanketed with a covering of felt, as if Beuys needed to doubly emphasize the piano's silencing, first enacted through its appropriation into the context of art, which had already rendered it useless (Fig. 2.38). The same could be said of *Grüne Geiger* (Green Violin), a multiple Beuys co-authored in 1974 with Danish artist Henning Christiansen (who had also played a bit part on the recording for *Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja*) (Fig. 2.39). Declaring the violin a work of art by stamping it with the insignia of "Fluxus Zone West" would relegate it already to uselessness, but painting it a vibrating Kelly green (possibly a reference to Beuys's activities with the Free International University in Ireland) transforms it into an image, a painting in three dimensions that still bears the sign of sound (and the obtuse sign of an organization that no longer exists) but will forever remain silent. The instrument had originally been paired together in a crate with the multiple *Telefon S——E* (Telephone T——R), a set of tin-cans stamped with *Braunkreuz* crosses and joined with string (Fig. 2.40).⁵⁵ It makes for a pathetic telephone,

⁵⁵ I asked Schellmann why the two multiples had ultimately not been sold together, and he explained that potential customers did not care for the wooden crate that held the two objects, together titled *Fluxus-Objekte* (Fluxus Objects), along with a publication on "acoustic art." He obtained Beuys's permission to retire the crates and to sell the objects as separate multiples. Interview with the author, December 4, 2013.

more appropriate for a child's game than for the sophisticated forms of communication Beuys wanted to engage. In contrast with the aim of multiples to spread Beuys's aesthetic ideology far and wide, the tin-can telephone could only enable communication across a comically short distance, yet another instance in which Beuys thematizes the limitations of speech.

Silence is the subject of still more multiples, most notably *Das Schweigen* (The Silence) (1973), a set of five zinc-plated reels of Ingmar Bergman's film of the same name (Fig. 2.41), where zinc plays the permanent role felt assumes in *Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja*.⁵⁶ While several multiples consist of inscribed blackboards nodding to Beuys's pedagogical methods (and eventually to his large-scale blackboard installations), he also published *Noiseless Blackboard Eraser* (1974) in conjunction with his US speaking tour, following a mix-up in which he had erased the blackboard from his first lecture before his New York gallerist could varnish it (Fig. 2.42).⁵⁷ As a multiple, the eraser compensated for Beuys's foiled desire for ephemerality, but it also operates as a sign of eradication, of deletion, and of speech as an ongoing, palimpsestic activity, which his varnished blackboards, rendered static works of art, demonstrably resist.

Silence, for Beuys, acts as a metaphor for political inaction, but also, as we have seen, as a way of addressing the limitations of political speech. One final example demonstrates how Beuys uses silence to highlight more general tensions between art and politics in his work. The 1982 multiple *Stempelplastik* (Stamp Sculpture), produced in an edition of 35, implies an invitation to its owners to apply the included "Hauptstrom" stamp to a stack of PVC postcards

⁵⁶ Silence is the subject of several thematic essays by Gottfried Boehm and Mara Naef in the exhibition catalogue *Parallelprozesse*, but neither address this theme with reference to the multiples.

⁵⁷ Ronald Feldman recounted this incident for me, which turned out to be much more colorful than I had imagined. According to Feldman, Beuys had pilfered an eraser from his Cooper Union speaking engagement because he liked how it looked, and Feldman offered to track down several hundred of the exact same brand in order to create a multiple that could be sold cheaply for the rest of Beuys's tour. Interview with the author, May 8, 2015.

and distribute them (Fig. 2.43). The postcards, which bear the handwritten inscription “honey is flowing in all directions,” had previously been released by Edition Staeck in an unlimited edition in 1980. They refer directly to Beuys’s 1979 *Honigpumpe am Arbeitsplatz* (Honeypump in the Workplace) installation at *documenta 6*, where honey literally flowed in all directions through piping threaded through the galleries and interstitial spaces of the Museum Fridericianum, symbolizing the movement of energy and thought throughout the museum as it hosted workshops and lectures organized by the Free International University. The multiple embodies Beuys’s desire to extend that flow of creative energy—the *Hauptstrom*, or main stream—much farther out into the world.

But to stamp these postcards and distribute them, as the owner of the multiple, would be to destroy it as a sculpture. In its derivation from Beuys’s activities at *documenta 6*, the multiple embodies a process whereby thought has been turned into action, and action has been transformed into object—but it rests there, congealed. Art and action are less in communion here than in direct tension with one another. The object communicates Beuys’s ideas, but it always already represents the paradox of action called for and not taken, as the work’s status as art renders it ineffective as political speech. Sympathetically, we could understand the object as embodying a kind of eternal potential, suspended there in the object forever, allowing it to serve into the future as a “prop for memory.”

This particular object, however, to return to the issue of unstable materials that concerned us earlier in this chapter, troubles that implied, utopian futurity in its very materials. Examples of these postcards, as I witnessed firsthand in the collection of the Busch-Reisinger Museum, are already experiencing potentially unstoppable chemical changes. Components of the PVC from which they are constructed leach out and bead up on the surface of the postcards, obscuring the

text in the short term and eventually threatening to disintegrate entirely. In many cases, the postcards have been stored in a stack, allowing the leaching chemicals to weld them together, or at least make the task of pulling them apart virtually impossible. If we want to understand this object as a representation of perpetual political potential, then we must also come to terms with the fact that its potential for mere survival is tenuous and precious. Although seemingly more stable than Beuys's many fat pieces, the PVC postcards nonetheless are also in constant flux, with a shelf-life much shorter than that of the traditionally conceived artwork. Beuys attempted to secure his aesthetic ideology within obdurate objects that, by virtue of their status as art, demand care and thus promise longevity, but the materials he chose to work with again and again render his objects, and the ideas they are meant to telegraph, vulnerable and sometimes even mute.

This Sum of Catastrophes: 7000 Oaks and the Long View of History

“I lived through a large number of catastrophes. Actually, I can say that this sum of catastrophes is not concluded, I experience these catastrophes daily.”¹

On March 16, 1982, Joseph Beuys planted a single oak tree on a well-manicured plaza in the sleepy town of Kassel. Photographs taken that day show Beuys, cloaked in his signature fishing vest, full-length jacket, and Stetson hat, working with a group of his associates from the Free International University to dig a hole into earth not yet defrosted from the unforgiving German winter (Figs. 3.1-2). Cheered by a crowd of onlookers, they managed with some effort to create a pit large enough for a skinny young oak sapling, girded it from the wind and rain with stakes on either side, and then triumphantly covered its roots with fresh soil. The oak planted that day on Friedrichsplatz, in front of the Museum Fridericianum, was to be the first of 7000 trees they would plant throughout Kassel for the seventh iteration of *documenta*, organized that year by Dutch curator Rudi Fuchs. Next to each of the oaks would be placed a basalt stone stele, a small reminder that each tree was a component piece of a much larger environmental installation. The day before the first tree planting, workers had begun piling thousands of steles onto Friedrichsplatz to await their placement throughout the city, serving in the meantime as a monumental stone sculpture and a highly visible register of the project’s advancement toward completion—a literal ledger that looked, not coincidentally, like the massive piles of rubble that dotted the city after Allied bombing had ravaged the landscape toward the end of World War II (Fig. 3.3).

¹ Joseph Beuys, qtd. in Helmut Rywelski, “Heute ist jeder Mensch Sonnenkönig [transcript of an interview of 18 May 1970],” *Joseph Beuys. Einzelheiten*. Art Intermedia Book 3. (Cologne 1970), n.p.

That chilly Tuesday in March, several months before the official start of *documenta*, marked exactly thirty-eight years to the day after Beuys and a fellow pilot, serving in Hitler's *Luftwaffe*, crashed their plane over the Crimea, severely injuring Beuys and killing his co-pilot.² In the late 1960s, when pressed to relate the details of his military service, Beuys confided that when he crashed in the Crimea, nomadic Tatars had come to his rescue; later, the episode morphed into an origin story for Beuys's prodigious use of fat and felt in his work, as he claimed that the Tatars had enrobed him in fat and felt to restore his broken body. Once connected to his artistic practice, the story quickly became the default explanatory reference for deciphering Beuys's work, especially because it emerged at the moment that he was gaining an intrigued—and mystified—international audience. For Beuys to choose to link the day of his plane crash to *7000 Oaks* is remarkable: it ties the project, which was couched as an act of environmental activism (or, in Beuys's terms, ecological social sculpture) to the biographical event that had come to define his work and to associate it, however indeterminately, with his military service and the disastrous end of the Third Reich.

The crash story has been the lynchpin around which scholars in Germany and the United States have condemned Beuys's practice and his mythologizing of biography, though Gene Ray and Kim Levin have mounted compelling arguments that Beuys's work, while at times self-mythologizing, is also engaged with the project of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past.³ Though Ray cites examples from Beuys's oeuvre that overtly reference the

² Though the auxiliary details of Beuys's crash have been disputed, the date is firm. The crash is listed as occurring on March 16 in the definitive biographies of the artist, as well as in the extensively researched chronology of Beuys's life and work published in the exhibition catalogue *Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments*, ed. Mark Rosenthal (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 153.

³ Kim Levin, "Joseph Beuys: The New Order," *Arts Magazine* (April 1980); and Gene Ray, "Joseph Beuys and the After-Auschwitz Sublime," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York: D.A.P. with The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), 58.

Nazi era, including his submission to the 1957-58 competition for a memorial at Auschwitz (which is now entombed in the vitrine *Auschwitz Demonstration*, part of the permanent installation *Block Beuys*), his use of fat as an invocation of the corporeality of Holocaust victims, and numerous installations involving felt and wooden structures that recall camp barracks and their spare amenities, *7000 Oaks* is absent from Ray's analysis, perhaps because he missed, like much of Beuys's contemporaneous audience, the connection between the project and the crash story. That link, however, is just one small point in a constellation of references the project makes to the Third Reich and the *völkisch* discourse that pre- and post-dated it. The ambition of this discussion is to uncover, through close investigation of Beuys's last and largest work, new ways of understanding the complexity of his attempts to navigate personal and cultural history through the project of social sculpture, and particularly through a simultaneously retrospective and future-oriented aesthetic ideology embodied in the form of the oak, multiplied and dispersed.

The first section of this chapter excavates the multilayered iconography and historical contexts of *7000 Oaks*, exposing the project's ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning, which went largely unspoken in the 1980s and has continued to elude critics and historians. The project, I argue, was calibrated to call up the traumatic Nazi past, not only through the symbolism of the oak tree but also through the pile of basalt on Friedrichsplatz and its recollections of Zero Hour destruction and rebuilding. As a social sculpture, erected with contributions of money and labor from the community it would serve, *7000 Oaks* also called upon the citizens of Kassel to transform historical trauma into a future-oriented improvement to their own environment.

The second section skips forward in time, from 1987, the year of *7000 Oaks*' completion, to 2012, when numerous artists developed projects for *documenta 13* that reflected on the meaning and continued importance of *7000 Oaks* to the history of the exhibition and the

landscape of the city. While scholarship on Beuys has often been limited by a belief that the meaning of his work is circumscribed by own interpretations, such persistent art-historical blind spots have not inhibited younger generations of artists from approaching his work anew. I argue, finally, that the most compelling evidence of openness in Beuys's work—a feature I have consistently aimed to elucidate in this dissertation—has in fact been provided by the work of *documenta* participants who have shown *7000 Oaks* to be literally and figuratively generative. This continuing provocation of imaginative creation is social sculpture at its fullest.

The Iconography of *7000 Oaks*

In 1955, when the German artist and curator Arnold Bode chose the small, unassuming town of Kassel as the venue for a major exhibition called *documenta*, he did so largely because Kassel remained scarred by the Allied firebombing it had suffered during World War II (Fig. 3.4). The city's visible wounds could draw visitors' attention to the lasting effects of war, allowing Bode to register a profound statement about the persistence of culture in the face of physical and psychological trauma that had not yet abated.⁴ The rawness of the damaged Museum Fridericianum and the bombed-out skeletons of nearby buildings formed a poignant backdrop for the reintroduction of art that had been condemned by the Nazis as “degenerate” nearly twenty years earlier. With its initial exhibition a great success, *documenta* established a foundation with the intent of becoming a quinquennial event, and from its second iteration

⁴ For more on the history of *documenta*, see the recently published volume *60 Jahre Documenta: Die lokale Geschichte einer Globalisierung*, ed. Hans Eichel (Berlin/Kassel: B&S Siebenhaar Verlag, 2015). See also Walter Grasskamp, “To Be Continued: Periodic Exhibitions (dOCUMENTA, for Example),” *Tate Papers* 12 (Autumn 2009): <http://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/12/to-be-continued-periodic-exhibitions-documenta-for-example>; and Max Rosenberg, “Transforming Documenta: Art, Legitimacy and Modernity in Postwar West Germany” (PhD diss., Yale University, 2015).

onward, the condemned art of the past was shown together with—and provided historical context for—the most avant-garde work of the present.

By the time that Beuys planted his first oak in Kassel in 1982, he had already participated in four previous iterations of *documenta*, discussed variously in the preceding chapters. Over nearly forty years, Beuys executed projects that progressively challenged the constrained gallery spaces of the exhibition's main venue, the Museum Fridericianum, and the traditional notion of sculpture as discrete, exhibitable object. In 1964, at *documenta 3*, Beuys was represented almost entirely by works he had made in the 1950s. One section of the exhibition dedicated to drawing presented several of Beuys's small figural drawings, each with an unfinished, sketchy quality that embodied Beuys's approach to drawing as a form of thinking. A group of his enigmatic "Queen Bee" sculptures, crafted from wax and wood, were also included in the contemporary wing of the show, "Aspekte 1964" (Aspects 1964), which featured painting and sculpture by artists such as Arman, Lee Bontecou, Jasper Johns, and Günther Uecker (Fig. 3.5). Four years later, for the *Ambiente* (Environments) section of *documenta 4*, Beuys designed a room-sized installation of evocative found objects and quasi-minimalist sculpture crafted from metal and felt, attaching one sculptural component to a "warming machine" that would distribute energy throughout the space (Fig. 3.6). The machine, placed on the floor next to two hefty metal tables, looked like a gadget concocted by an amateur science geek, with vials full of liquid and neat rolls of felt that served a pseudo-scientific purpose left to the imagination.

Documenta 4 famously neglected to include many newer trends in art-making, most notably Happenings, Fluxus, and performance, generating protest from artists who felt that *documenta* was overly conservative and market-driven. Beuys, who was by then known for his performance work, had also established the German Student Party the year prior and was

working towards an ever more political persona. Though his installation at *documenta 4* largely eschewed both the performative and political aspects of his work, he found ways of using the exhibition as a platform for his ideas. One report published in the *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten* describes Beuys arguing with students about Marxist revolution deep into the night in front of the Museum Fridericianum,⁵ while Beuys also agreed to publish a postcard with Klaus Staeck showing a view of Kassel stamped with the insignia of the German Student Party, to be distributed in Kassel during *documenta* as a form of protest against the exhibition's exclusion of "lower" forms of art-making (Fig. 3.7).⁶

In 1972, for the now-infamous *documenta 5* curated by Harald Szeemann, Beuys moved away from traditional sculpture altogether, setting up a satellite informational office for his Düsseldorf-based political action group, the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum, and concluded the exhibition with an absurdist boxing match in the gallery space next door. Five years later, he installed at *documenta 6* an ambitious network of plastic tubing that pumped two tons of honey throughout the Museum Fridericianum, functioning (not unlike the bizarre "warming" gadget from *documenta 4*) as a symbolic circulation system that would absorb and redistribute energy generated by lectures and discussions sponsored by Beuys's Free International University, which hosted lectures and discussions in a gallery space much as the Organization for Direct Democracy had done previously.

For the many followers of Beuys's career, the debut of *7000 Oaks* in 1982 appeared to be the culmination of his decades-long advance toward realizing social sculpture. The ultimate goal of social sculpture was not the creation of temporary spaces for dialogue, like the Office for

⁵ Dieter Westecker, "An alle Ecken Düsseldorf: Vertreter der Kunststadt überall auf der 4. *documenta* in Kassel," *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*, July 4, 1968.

⁶ See "Klaus Staeck im Gespräch mit Heinz Holtmann am 20.1.2009," *Sediment 16* (Joseph Beuys - Wir betreten den Kunstmarkt, 2009): 61.

Direct Democracy or the galleries occupied for a summer by the Free International University. The goal was long-lasting social change, and Beuys recognized, in this final project, that to make something happen that would be both the product of his vision *and* the product of collective labor and investment, he had to conduct social sculpture outside of the museum, in concert with citizens and governmental entities. True to his outsized aims, *7000 Oaks* would eventually be dispersed throughout the city of Kassel, in its parks, on its plazas, and running alongside its roadways—and not just for a single summer, but for as long as the city would agree to maintain it. The burdensome short- and long-term commitments required of city government were not lost on local officials. Kassel’s city council, even its more liberal members, roundly debated the merits of the project when it was first proposed, with some raising valid concerns about an artwork that, unlike virtually all other *documenta* works that leave Kassel at the close of the exhibition, would instead become a part of the city itself, a prospect for which there was little precedent.⁷ Although a small non-profit was founded to care for *7000 Oaks* into the future, maintenance of the trees would have to be coordinated with city government in perpetuity, a major undertaking for the parks department of an otherwise quiet town, especially because the trees would be components of an artwork, necessitating greater vigilance in care than ordinary forestation. Predictably, council members—and many citizens of Kassel—also objected to the piling of basalt stones in front of the Museum Fridericianum; not only would the massive heap of basalt be unsightly, it would sit there for as long as the project took to be completed, and there

⁷ Although *7000 Oaks* became one of the most visible permanent *documenta* works, three others preceded it, all installed at *documenta 6* in 1977: Walter de Maria’s *Vertical Earth Kilometer*, installed underground on Friedrichsplatz (and displaced many years later by the construction of an underground parking garage); Haus-Rucker-Co’s *Rahmenbau* (Frame Construction), a larger-than-life steel and glass frame overlooking two opposing landscapes; and Horst Baumann’s *Laserscape Kassel*, the world’s first permanent laser sculpture, which emits three beams of light over the city. Other works have been purchased by the city for the permanent collection of the Museum Fridericianum, though such works have much lower visibility (and lesser cause for controversy) than those that are installed as elements of the landscape.

were no provisions in place for dealing with lingering stones should the project fail to achieve full funding.⁸ Despite these vociferous objections, Beuys prevailed, and *7000 Oaks* adopted a new defiant slogan that often appeared as the subtitle of the work: “*Stadtverwaltung statt Stadtverwaltung*,” city forestation instead of city administration, a slap in the face of the very governmental body that would ensure the work’s long-term preservation.

That oppositional tone turned public focus onto the project’s political mission and its logistical difficulties, a focus that shifted again to the project’s unexpected status as Beuys’s last work following his death from heart failure in 1986, a year before the final tree would be planted at the start of *documenta 8*. As a result of those complicating factors, the symbolic content of *7000 Oaks* flew largely under the radar of both the city council—which pled ignorance of contemporary art in order to focus purely on technical issues—and the general public. One hint of the project’s provocations lingers in an exchange between Beuys and a participant in one of many public talks Beuys gave in support of *7000 Oaks* and social sculpture in general. During a question-and-answer session following a lecture in Bonn in 1982, Beuys was asked why he chose the oak as the namesake of the project, given the oak’s fascist associations and the fact that other kinds of trees would be planted. Beuys responded, “I really didn’t want to act in an

⁸ City council transcripts dating from 1982 and 1984, folder E002_IV_003 (FIU II; Kassel; 7000 Eichen), Papers of Collector Günther Ulbricht, Zentalarchiv des Kunsthandels, Cologne. The council had good reason to be concerned about the financial viability of *7000 Oaks*, which was coordinated under the auspices of the Free International University (FIU) with the help of the Dia Art Foundation in New York. To cover *7000 Oaks*’ projected total cost of 3.5 million Deutschmarks, Dia and the FIU mounted a billboard advertising campaign in Kassel and circulated an appeal to individuals in Europe and the US, asking them to donate 500 Deutschmarks each to cover the cost of a single tree planting. Beuys himself gave the project significant funds, generated in part through the sale of his work, and in 1984, he agreed to an exhibition at the Seibu Museum of Art in Tokyo on the condition that the museum’s parent institution, the Seibu Department Store, donate to *7000 Oaks*. The museum hosted Beuys for eight days, giving him enough time to lecture at local universities, take nature walks with students, and pose for advertisements for Nikka Whiskey, the proceeds of which benefitted *7000 Oaks*. Documentation of many facets of *7000 Oaks*, including fundraising, advertising, implementation, and public reception, can be found in the compendium *7000 Eichen*, eds. Fernando Groener and Rose-Maria Kandler (Cologne: König, 1987).

arbitrary manner. I wanted a tree capable of provoking all these questions.” When pressed on the dangerous connections between the oak and a mythic “Germanism,” Beuys replied emphatically, “We really ought to quash this so-called ‘German question,’ but we must resolve it once and for all. It is similar above all else to the problem felt by many people in a fundamental, spiritual form. I have already stated that it is not the Germans who have availed themselves most of the oak, but rather the Celts, that is to say a people who were living principally in France; there the oak grows rather better than it does in Germany whose climate is harsher.”⁹

Beuys’s frustrating, diversionary response was typical of his public pronouncements. As ever, such misdirections or mystifications have to be measured against the work they describe. It is undeniable that the Celtic world held special importance for Beuys, who often located his sense of spirituality and connectedness with the earth in Celtic culture.¹⁰ He spent significant time in Ireland in the 1970s, with a well-documented 1974 trip to Giant’s Causeway—a stunning natural phenomenon in Northern Ireland consisting of 40,000 interlocking basalt steles—that undoubtedly inspired his subsequent use of basalt as a material for sculpture. But basalt, it must be said, can also be found in the mountainous regions of Beuys’s native Germany, and it is fair to assume that for most Germans, a project aiming to plant thousands of oak trees in Kassel spoke less obviously to Germans’ Celtic pre-history than to the much more recent proliferation of the

⁹ “‘Time’s Thermic Machine,’ a public dialogue, Bonn, 1982,” reproduced in *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America: Writings by and Interviews with the Artist*, ed. Carin Kuoni (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), 95-96.

¹⁰ See, among others, Sean Rainbird, *Joseph Beuys and the Celtic World: Scotland, Ireland, and England 1970-85* (London: Tate, 2005); Caroline Tisdall, “Joseph Beuys and the Celtic World,” in *Joseph Beuys: Diverging Critiques*, ed. David Thistlewood (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press and Tate Gallery Liverpool, 1995), 107-128; and Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, 1979).

oak as a nationalist symbol under the Third Reich—even, or perhaps especially, if such a fraught relation could not be candidly discussed.

As with the swastika, the Nazis adopted the oak from a much longer tradition that preceded them and from which they claimed to derive a kind of mythic authority. The story of their appropriation begins in the late eighteenth century, when the Romantic poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock, looking to the ancient past, chose the oak as the emblem of German character. A sturdy, long-living tree, it stood for independence and resolve, as well as opposition to—and supremacy over—French neoclassicism at a time when French hegemony in central Europe was on the rise and Germanic polities were forced to mobilize to defend their sovereignty. Subsequently, the nineteenth century witnessed an evolving discourse around the German forest, which was seen as integral to the identity of Germanic landscapes and peoples; in the decades prior to the founding of the German state in 1871, that discourse accrued nationalistic overtones, driving the charge towards unity and statehood founded on common territory and linguistic heritage.¹¹ The oak featured centrally, for example, in the unrealized designs of neo-Gothic cathedrals by architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel, whose drawings show churches encircled by dense oak forests (Fig. 3.8).¹²

Half a century after Germany's founding, the National Socialists latched onto the oak as a symbol rooted in nationalistic sympathies. They foregrounded the oak in their elaborate ceremonial pageantry, eventually incorporating the tree, often synecdochically represented by its leaves or its acorns, into all manner of civil and military paraphernalia, from currency to forestry

¹¹ The importance of the oak in Germanic tradition is discussed at length in Jeffrey K. Wilson, *The German Forest: Nature, Identity, and the Contestation of a National Symbol, 1871-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012).

¹² Sabine Wieber, "From *Kulturnation* to *Staatsnation*: German National Identity, 1800-90," in *Confronting Identities in German Art: Myths, Reactions, Reflections*, exh. cat. (Chicago: The David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art at the University of Chicago, 2003), 25.

badges, propaganda posters, and standard-issue military belt buckles (Figs. 3.9-12). The Nazis' obsession with the oak was even literalized in 1936, when Adolf Hitler gifted each gold medal winner at the Olympic Games in Berlin an oak sapling to plant in his or her home country, thereby colonizing the planet with the fruits of German soil (Fig. 3.13).¹³ Hitler's gesture powerfully invoked the ideology of *Blut und Boden*, blood and soil, which he had strenuously (and controversially) advocated in his rise to power in the 1920s. Based on a Romantic vision of Germany's agrarian past that had significant rhetorical purchase in the late nineteenth century, blood and soil rhetoric located the rugged toughness of German character in the countryside, in the figure of the peasant farmer and in glorified rural life that embodied *Heimatgefühl*, or a strong sense of the homeland. The valorization of the rural, also central to the politically diverse fin-de-siècle *Lebensreform* (life reform) movement, was, on the whole, a feat of regressive propaganda in the face of the nation's successful industrialization and vibrant urban centers, which were key to continued economic recovery in the wake of World War I.¹⁴ By the 1930s,

¹³ A number of Olympians did indeed carry out Hitler's wishes, including American track star Jesse Owens, who dominated the 1936 games with four gold medal wins. Owens received four saplings and planted them in various cities in his native Ohio. See Mhari Saito, "Jesse Owens' Legacy, And Hitler's Oak Trees," *NPR's Morning Edition*, July 27, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/07/27/138590488/jesse-owens-legacy-and-hitlers-oak-trees>. Remarkable extant photographs from the Olympics show Owens holding his oak saplings, surrounded by teammates in their dormitory in Berlin. Owens also listed the locations of surviving oaks in his voiceover for the 1966 documentary *Jesse Owens Returns to Berlin*, which was re-broadcast internationally in 1976 as part of director Bud Greenspan's widely acclaimed, twenty-two-episode documentary series *The Olympiad*.

¹⁴ Wieber discusses the urban-rural divide with reference to late nineteenth-century painting: "These peasants are timelessly rooted to the soil; their unchanging, heroically simple existence served as an antithesis to the transitoriness of modern urban life in the new German empire. The poet Rainer Maria Rilke observed in this regard that city inhabitants had 'lost their connectedness to the earth'..." "From *Kultur*nation to *Staats*nation," 36. The image of the city as site of the nation's moral decline (and its corporeal manifestations, most notably venereal disease) was common in the early twentieth century; many of the Weimar-era *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Objectivity) artists thematized—and indeed reveled in—urban vices (alcoholism, drug use, prostitution, homosexuality, cross-dressing), following the precedent of Expressionist Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, who, after relocating to Berlin from genteel Dresden in 1911, painted a series of garish street scenes featuring audaciously-clad prostitutes. See *New Objectivity: Modern German Art in the Weimar Republic, 1919-1933*, eds. Stephanie Barron and Sabine

Nazi thinkers marshaled blood and soil ideology as justification for eugenicist race theory, claiming that rural values stemmed from ethnic purity, and that a master Aryan race free of illness and immorality could be created by eradicating undesirables and re-populating Germany (and the world) with the progeny of the Teutonic countryside.¹⁵ Innumerable governmental programs and policies, from the Hitler Youth to the creation of concentration camps for Jews, gypsies, Communists, homosexuals, and the disabled, resulted from the wide propagation and acceptance of blood and soil race theory.

Given the centrality of blood and soil to Nazi ideology, it is not surprising that mention of an ancestral relation to the land became unspeakably taboo after the fall of the Third Reich. It must be acknowledged, however, that once-ubiquitous ideologies did not simply dissipate after their most vocal progenitors had been removed from power; that was especially true for blood and soil, which had been a facet of German thought and culture for many decades before it was marshaled by the Nazis. In fact, post-war de-Nazification efforts spearheaded by the Allied Powers no doubt exacerbated the problem by criminalizing Nazi behavior, thus shunting remnants of Nazi philosophy underground where they could thrive covertly. While public advocacy of any idea resembling blood and soil was unthinkable after the war, belief in a strong bond between German identity and the physical landscape became an insidious ideological

Eckmann (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 2015); and for a well-illustrated treatment of Weimar urban culture, see Mel Gordon, *Voluptuous Panic: The Erotic World of Weimar Berlin* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House Press, 2008).

¹⁵ Prominent Nazi ideologist Richard Walther Darré, who was a member of the *völkisch* proto-Nazi organization *Artamanen-Gesellschaft* (Artaman League) as a young man, and who went on to become Hitler's first agricultural minister, forwarded these arguments in his influential book *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden* (New Nobility from Blood and Soil), first published in 1930. See Ben Kiernan, *Blood and Soil: A World History of Genocide and Extermination from Sparta to Darfur* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 418-419.

undercurrent in the nascent Green movement by the 1960s.¹⁶ Although leftist progressives advocating for preservation measures in the face of decades of damaging industrialization dominated post-war environmentalist discourse, conservatives continued to link the German forest with national identity, extending the crux of blood and soil ideology into the late twentieth century.

Ideological contrasts within the diverse membership of Germany's official Green Party, *Die Grünen*, revived long-standing political tensions that originated in the nation's infancy, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Even in the early years of *Die Grünen*, which was founded in 1980, it was well known (if not publicly discussed) that its ranks were rife with former Nazis—so-called “Brown” aberrations—who sympathized both with the Greens' antagonism toward mainstream party politics and their investment in preserving what remained of the ravaged German countryside. As I discussed in Chapter 1, Beuys was a founding member of *Die Grünen*, a party born in West Germany as a mega-coalition of hundreds of *Bürgerinitiativen* (citizens' initiatives) from across the political spectrum, including several of Beuys's own action groups.¹⁷ Though the Greens were perceived from the outside as a single-

¹⁶ See Frank Uekoetter, *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, *Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience* (AK Press, 1995); Benjamin Weinthal, “The Nazi Roots of the German Greens,” *Jerusalem Post* online, July 7, 2013, <http://www.jpost.com/Jewish-World/Jewish-Features/The-Nazi-roots-of-the-German-Greens-318973>; and Christian Pfaffinger, “Mother Earth and the Fatherland: Germany's Far-Right Turns to Environmentalism,” *Spiegel Online International*, April 3, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/zeitgeist/german-neo-nazis-make-environment-a-campaign-issue-a-825564.html>. The phenomenon continues today; see Sally McGrane, “The Right-Wing Organic Farmers of Germany,” *New Yorker Magazine* online, January 11, 2013, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-right-wing-organic-farmers-of-germany>. McGrane cites a recent volume published by the Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, which details the presence of far-right sympathizers in the Green movement: *Braune Ökologen: Hintergründe und Strukturen am Beispiel Mecklenburg-Vorpommerns*, from the series *Schriften zur Demokratie* (Berlin: Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2012).

¹⁷ Lukas Beckmann narrates Beuys's role in the founding of *Die Grünen* in “The Causes Lie in the Future,” translated by S. Linberg and R. Brenner, in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York: D.A.P. with

issue party, their platform was indeed more accurately anti-party or meta-party—a philosophical position that diminished as they sought greater electoral success on the federal level, culminating in their entry into the Bundestag in 1983. The Greens knew that their anarchical, anti-party roots—which Beuys’s writings had helped to elucidate—would not catapult them to broader federal recognition; they pivoted instead to foreground their environmental platform, which attracted an engaged audience from left, right, and center.

At that precise moment, environmental concerns were particularly acute and understood as symptomatic of larger socio-political ills. The most dramatic and galvanizing issue was the Cold War proliferation of nuclear power and weaponry, which carried potentially catastrophic repercussions. Beuys himself participated in and organized a number of *Antiatomkraft* demonstrations, a common sight in West Germany for many years (and recently revived in the wake of Japan’s 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster, which lead German environmentalists to lobby successfully for the permanent closure of all nuclear reactors in Germany). While nuclear proliferation threatened global collapse, many Germans were also troubled by a regional plague dubbed *Waldsterben*, a widely observed phenomenon of “forest death” or deterioration observed throughout Western Europe and believed to be the result of industrial air pollution. Beuys was an early advocate of protecting the German forest, beginning with the Environmental Protection Workshop he created as part of his Organization for Direct Democracy. In December 1971, the workshop led a demonstration in the *Grafenberger Wald* (Grafenberg Forest) just outside of Düsseldorf to protest the proposed expansion of a nearby country club; together with a group of

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), 91-111. Though many in the Green Party disavowed Beuys in the 1980s and shut him out of contention for a seat in the Bundestag, today’s Green Party has acknowledged their indebtedness to his contributions. See “Joseph Beuys hat Die Grünen geprägt,” *Bündnis 90 / Die Grünen* website, January 21, 2011, <http://www.gruene.de/presse/joseph-beuys-hat-die-gruenen-gepraegt.html>.

students and activists, Beuys symbolically swept the forest floor with wooden brooms under the battle cry, “Overcome the dictatorship of the political parties! Save the forest!” (Fig. 3.14)¹⁸

By the early 1980s, Waldsterben scenarios touted by leading German scientists were causing a panic, with scientists and lay people alike convinced that forests—a feature of the landscape so critical to German identity—were in severe and irreversible decline.¹⁹ The November 16, 1981 issue of *Der Spiegel* bore the doomsday title “Saurer Regen über Deutschland: Der Wald stirbt” (Acid Rain over Germany: The Forest is Dying), against an image of smokestacks towering over a crop of trees. The overwhelming media coverage of the Waldsterben theory in the late 70s and 80s created the perfect backdrop for a project like *7000 Oaks*, which involved the planting of thousands of trees in an effort—in Beuys’s shamanistic terms—to “heal” the earth.²⁰ Of course, Beuys’s gesture would be partly (or even primarily) symbolic, both in its imagery and in its relatively minor contribution to re-forestation efforts, but insofar as the project would actually make a small but long-lasting environmental impact, which

¹⁸ See David Levi Strauss, *From Head to Hand: Art and the Manual* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 34. Beuys subsequently produced two offset lithographs featuring photographs of the demonstration, showing a rather ominous group of men wielding shovels and spades in the forest. See inventory numbers 42 and 45 in Jörg Schellmann, *Die Multiples* (Munich: Schirmer Mosel Verlag, 1992), with an accompanying description of the *Aktion* in the catalogue’s back matter.

¹⁹ Several histories have been written about the Waldsterben theory and its consequences, including Birgit Metzger, “*Erst stirbt der Wald, dann du!*“*Das Waldsterben als westdeutsches Politikum (1978–1986)* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus, 2015). In recent years, the media has also reported that new research discredits the science behind the *Waldsterben* panic, noting not only that forest death was fairly minimal, but that its cause was likely not air pollution. See, for example, Claus Hecking, “Was wurde eigentlich aus dem Waldsterben?” *Spiegel Online*, January 3, 2015, <http://www.spiegel.de/wissenschaft/natur/umweltschutz-was-wurde-aus-dem-waldsterben-a-1009580.html>.

²⁰ Beuys’s efforts towards a “radical ecology” are succinctly outlined in Strauss, *From Head to Hand*, 33–37, and in greater depth in David Adams, “Joseph Beuys: Pioneer of a Radical Ecology,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 26–34. See also Cara Jordan, “Appealing for an Alternative: Ecology and Environmentalism in Joseph Beuys’ Projects of Social Sculpture,” *Seismopolite: Journal of Art and Politics* 15 (Art and Political Ecology II), August 10, 2016, <http://www.seismopolite.com/appealing-for-an-alternative-ecology-and-environmentalism-in-joseph-beuys-projects-of-social-sculpture>.

Beuys intended to replicate elsewhere, *7000 Oaks* exceeded mere symbolism and manifested, more fully than any other project Beuys initiated, the principles of social sculpture.²¹ No other project initiated by Beuys effected a permanent or even long-lasting change to the political landscape; in turning to the natural world, Beuys found a way to leave a substantial mark behind. Moreover, while the work was without doubt his own vision, it required the active participation of hundreds of people, from the donors who “purchased” trees for 500 Deutschmarks each to the volunteers who planted saplings, one after the other, and hauled heavy basalt steles from the pile on Friedrichsplatz to their permanent homes throughout the town of Kassel over a period of five years. It was also perhaps Beuys’s most publicly accessible project; a recent film that addresses the history of *documenta* and its role in the city life of Kassel records the statements of a number of older residents who are otherwise fairly disdainful of *documenta* and the art world in general, but who boast of the “Beuys-Bäume” (Beuys trees) in and around their neighborhoods. They might not recall any of the particulars of Beuys’s aesthetic ideology (or have any use for it), but they feel a strong sense of ownership as a community over the *7000 Oaks* project and its lasting impact on their environment.²²

With these various elements of historical context laid bare, it is easier to understand what Beuys meant when he said that he chose the oak because it was “capable of provoking all these

²¹ In 1982, Beuys indicated that *7000 Oaks* would be an ongoing effort: “I believe that planting these oaks is necessary not only in biospheric terms... but in that it was raise ecological consciousness—raise it increasingly, in the course of years to come, because we shall never stop planting.” (Qtd. in Strauss, *From Head to Hand*, 33.) After Beuys’s death, *7000 Oaks* did indeed engender tree-planting projects in a number of places around the world, discussed further in the epilogue, including Chelsea, New York (near the Dia Art Foundation’s offices and exhibition space); County Westmeath, Ireland; Aberdeenshire, Scotland; and in digital form on “Cosmos Island” in the virtual world *Second Life*, as part of a performance by the artist duo Eva and Franco Mattes. Further spin-offs of *7000 Oaks* are detailed here on the Phaidon blog, last accessed September 14, 2017, <http://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/articles/2014/may/12/how-joseph-beuys-celebrated-his-63rd-birthday/>.

²² A number of proud Kassellers are interviewed about “their” Beuys trees in the documentary film *Art’s Home is My Kassel: 100 Tage documenta Stadt*, directed by Katrin and Susanne Heinz, 2013.

questions.” *7000 Oaks* was initiated by an artist who had often thematized his military service in World War II, and who linked the project to the date of his own plane crash; the project utilized—and exalted—what many would have perceived as Nazi symbolism; and it derived its contemporary relevance in part from the discourse (one might say propaganda) of Die Grünen, which was known to be supported by unrepentant Nazis and far-right sympathizers alongside leftist progressives—all of whom wanted to save the element of the German landscape most bound up with national identity. Many might look at this tally of evidence and conclude that Beuys was guilty of erecting at *documenta* an impressive monument to fascism and *völkisch* tradition, an effort aided by a diverse group of compatriots who gave their time, money, or physical labor to realize Beuys’s vision. But it is also possible to take a more generous view, following in the footsteps of Peter Nisbet, Gene Ray, and others, to see these connections and their ambiguities of meaning as directives to consider the present’s link to the past, and to consider especially whether it might still be possible to rehabilitate and instrumentalize that which has been tainted by Nazism—whether the image of the oak, Germans’ relationship to their land, or Romantic aesthetic ideology.²³

Beuys’s primary critics have contended that his insistent self-mythification was motivated by a desire to escape history, to “[make] all historical reality disappear behind a self-

²³ Caroline Tisdall, Beuys’s longtime interlocutor, suggests this reading in an interview with curator Sean Rainbird that appeared in *Joseph Beuys and the Celtic World: Scotland, Ireland and England 1970-85* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005). Her remembrance merits quoting in full: “We went to Externstein in 1975 when he was still recovering from his heart attack. It was a day trip to an absolute taboo place, as it was one of Hitler’s shrines to the Germanic spirit. All the Germanic gods were meant to be there; one of those fat fertility goddesses was dug up there. He wanted his photograph taken with his hand over his heart. What came out was a de-politicized image. It was tongue-in-cheek but like an oath-swearing gesture. He has the confidence to do that. Just like the *7000 Oaks* project which was growing in his mind at the time. The oak is the symbol that you find on the Iron Cross. The Nazis had really tried to subsume it into their hierarchy of symbols. As Beuys always said, it is terrible to deny the ‘oakness’ of your countryside just because of the Nazis. If you do that, you deny your own culture, your own history.”

created myth of the artist-hero.”²⁴ The result, in critic Stefan Germer’s view, is that “Beuys’s audience is presented with a system of interconnecting links and mutually supporting interpretations and definitions that no longer permit consideration of anything outside the system.”²⁵ In attempting to highlight and condemn Beuys’s efforts to secure the meaning of his work, however, Germer reveals himself to be guilty of the same sin he decries. Does Germer truly believe (or merely find it convenient to argue) that artworks are incapable of exceeding their intended effects? Are viewers, lay and tutored, not permitted to discover historical resonances to which the artist himself had been blind or resistant? Lamenting the tendency by scholars and critics such as Germer to consider Beuys’s “life and art together as a single, unproblematized unity,” and echoing a mistrust of the author that has dominated art-historical discourse since the 1980s, Gene Ray has cautioned, “Any artist’s self-interpretations must be tested against the works themselves.”²⁶ Ray’s skepticism, which has been shared by few Beuys scholars, bears itself out in the evidence of individual works.

Although Beuys was unable or unwilling to foreground *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in self-interpretations of his work, preferring instead obtuse allusions to German pre-history, the complexity of a work such as *7000 Oaks*—to Beuys’s credit—belies such pat explanation. *7000 Oaks* is larger than Beuys, larger than his ideology or rhetoric or self-mythology, although of course it is partly through that self-mythology that the work addresses German history. Whether by design or accident, *7000 Oaks* embodies the polarities of the post-war German condition: a society rife with powerful symbolism that dare not be used, teeming with ideas that had been and

²⁴ Stefan Germer, “Haacke, Broodthaers, Beuys,” *October* 45 (Summer 1988): 71.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 161.

could again be perverted towards the worst ends, and populated with many aging citizens who had once pledged allegiance to Hitler and might be especially susceptible to Nazi nostalgia. In 1982, nearly forty years after its downfall, the Third Reich remained a potent specter, threatening to rise from the rubble of German culture and identity to consume a young democracy with shaky moral foundations and serious political, economic, and ecological challenges.

In the years required to bring *7000 Oaks* to completion, the image of rubble was indeed fundamental to the project. The heap of basalt on Friedrichsplatz that featured centrally in the unfolding of *7000 Oaks* resembled, not coincidentally, a massive pile of debris, demanding that a link be drawn between the forward-looking, enviro-utopian project of planting trees and the history that freighted the German landscape with trauma. Despite the profound resemblance, scholarly references made to *7000 Oaks* today rarely acknowledge that the steles once existed as a slowly diminishing pile on Friedrichsplatz, nor do they consider what that image might have called up for a certain generation. Beuys himself, however, reportedly made the ugliness of the basalt pile into a virtue. According to his long-time assistant Johannes Stüttgen, residents complained that the steles looked not only like rubble, but like the piles of corpses that had been heaped on Friedrichsplatz after devastating air raids. Stüttgen recalled, “Beuys said then, ‘This is a sculpture that needs to be dismantled. I really want to do away with the stones, but when you want them to disappear, you must give money. The more you give, the faster they disappear.’ Typical Beuys.”²⁷ Beuys’s ironic callousness contains a fascinating reversal of the notion of sculpture he typically espoused, which entailed individuals exercising their creativity to build something together. To be fair, the destructive gesture of contributing money in order to see the stone pile diminish in size also constituted an additive gesture, in that it funded the planting of

²⁷ Johannes Stüttgen, interview in the documentary short *Joseph Beuys 7000 Oaks: Documentation*, 2017, directed by Fabian Püschel, last accessed August 12, 2017, www.youtube.com/watch?v=HE87qEUtApI.

another tree, contributing to the dispersed social sculpture-in-becoming that was *7000 Oaks*. In the stones' relationship to the trauma of the war, one finds Beuys encouraging his fellow German citizens to work together to "dismantle" the Nazi past. The effect, however, was not to rid public space of traumatic memory once and for all, nor to cleanse Germans of their involvement in the Nazi regime, but to create an opportunity for citizens to work through that trauma collectively, perhaps for the first time, and in such a way that would also simultaneously reconfigure the past into something actually useful for the future—the trees and stones of *7000 Oaks*.

Many historians have noted the relationship of Beuys's materials to the conditions of the war and the *Stunde Null* (Zero Hour), including Gene Ray and Benjamin Buchloh. The latter, in his 1998 reconsideration of Beuys, wrote dismissively: "All of Beuys' materials are no doubt derived from the shambles of postwar Germany, in the literal sense of a culture in shambles, a culture of debris."²⁸ Buchloh's general charge, that Beuys is trading on the legacy of the Holocaust, is a fair critique, but I want to push back a bit on the revulsion towards "Holocaust art." It seems there is no way, under the terms that Buchloh has outlined in his writing on Beuys, for a German artist to confront the Nazi past without trading on trauma. The basalt pile, however, does more political work than a fat corner or a proposal for an Auschwitz memorial. It demanded attention and investment of a kind that the typical work of art does not, and its chosen imagery related specifically to the trauma non-Jewish Germans experienced during and after the war. I am reminded here of a photograph I once saw of a sign erected in the rubble in Cologne after air raids demolished much of the city center and damaged its medieval cathedral. The sign quoted Hitler's pronouncement, upon becoming chancellor, that "in four years, you will hardly recognize this country." The irony of the sign must have been deeply bitter. In using faux-rubble

²⁸ Benjamin Buchloh, "Reconsidering Joseph Beuys Once Again," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, ed. Gene Ray (New York: D.A.P. with The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, 2001), 86.

to force his fellow German citizens into action, Beuys is not calling up a valedictory image of the Nazi regime—he is offering a reminder of what Germany looked like after the Nazi regime had done its work. Peter Chametzky sees Beuys’s chosen materials as blatant affronts to the rhetoric of Nazi ideology, arguing that Beuys’s choice of fat in particular invokes its opposite, the Nazis’ muscular “armored body.”²⁹ Rubble, as a symbol of failure, destruction, and collective trauma, is anything but muscular.

While Beuys wanted nothing more than to see the basalt pile on Friedrichsplatz quickly disappear through the mobilized action of the community, he also realized how profoundly the image of the rubble contributed not only to *7000 Oaks*, but to his body of work in general. Beuys made an effort to secure more permanently the steles’ allusions to German history by concurrently creating four iterations of a monumental sculpture featuring basalt. In 1983, he temporarily removed forty-four of the stones from Kassel and shipped them to Düsseldorf’s Galerie Schmela, where he had had his first solo gallery show nearly two decades earlier. At Schmela, the stones were arranged on the floor in an installation sensationally titled *Das Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts* (The End of the Twentieth Century), and then were reconfigured under the same name in a much different space at the Haus der Kunst in Munich the following year.³⁰ At the same time, Beuys also designed an independent installation using basalt steles not derived from the pile in Kassel, with a first version appearing in Harald Szeemann’s 1983 exhibition *Der*

²⁹ Peter Chametzky, *Objects as History in Twentieth-Century German Art: Beckmann to Beuys* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 163.

³⁰ This installation was permanently moved to the Pinakothek der Moderne when the museum opened in 2002, assuming the collection of the Staatsgalerie moderner Kunst from the Haus der Kunst. The move occasioned a well-illustrated catalogue documenting the various iterations of the work; see Susanne Willisch and Bruno Heimberg, eds., *Joseph Beuys Das Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts: Die Umsetzung vom Haus der Kunst in die Pinakothek der Moderne München* (Munich: Schirmer/Mosel, 2007). The most unfortunate change in meaning effected by the move, in my judgment, is the loss of the Haus der Kunst’s historical relationship to the Nazi past.

Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk: Europäische Utopien seit 1800 (Tendencies Towards the Total Work of Art: European Utopias Since 1800), which was shown at the Städtische Kunsthalle in Düsseldorf. For this installation, which later morphed into a work now in the collection of the Tate in London, Beuys acquired twenty-one steles and had a cone-shaped piece of stone removed from each one, replacing it after filling the hole with felt and clay (Fig. 3.15). He gave loose instructions for the display of the work, eschewing a serial or gridded arrangement of the steles in favor of a layout that appeared haphazard—in other words, an organic smattering of stones lying on their sides, which looked more like environmental debris than the intentional, ordered work of an artist's hand.

In constructing several installations from the basalt steles of *7000 Oaks*, Beuys shifted and expanded their meaning, thereby impacting the meaning of the larger project from which they derived. He took the actual materials of the project from their original context as an ephemeral Earthwork or installation-in-waiting, plunked bluntly in the middle of a town square, and turned them into a self-contained, remarkably elegant sculptural artwork that could be exhibited within the space of a gallery. Such dramatic re-contextualization reconnected the steles—and by extension, *7000 Oaks*—to the traditional (indoor) spaces and institutions of contemporary art and their attendant histories. What was going to become a vast, dispersed environmental installation in Kassel was thus temporarily transformed into a minimalist sculpture or gallery-bound Earthwork, with a different physical presence and means of access than *7000 Oaks*, not to mention a significantly different matrix for interpretation and validation. Indeed, the title of the gallery-bound work—and the non-linear arrangement of stones that plays up their resemblance to well-manicured rubble—challenges the interpretation of *7000 Oaks* that Beuys so publically propagated.

The didactic texts that accompany the now permanent version of *The End of the Twentieth Century* at the Tate clarify the relationship between title and form, noting that “these materials [basalt, clay, felt] suggest the possibility of new life emerging at the end of a dark century.” The web-based version of the text specifies further that the steles’ “plugged cavities imply the potential for healing, suggesting the possibility of renewal and regeneration at the end of a violent and destructive century.”³¹ Rather than direct our attention to the association of basalt (or oaks) with the Celts, and thus to a long view of European history, the title, form, and composition of *The End of the Twentieth Century* baldly reference World War II and its immediate aftermath. The relationship between *7000 Oaks* and its derivative stone sculptures is revealed to be reciprocal: the stones’ placement next to young, growing trees in Kassel imparts a hopeful, almost utopian sensibility not only to *7000 Oaks* but also to the various installations Beuys created from the stones, as the Tate label copy alludes. In turn, the material reference to fallen cities and German history, cemented by the museum installations, serves to compound the symbolic resonances already subtly at work in *7000 Oaks*. Indeed, the use of basalt in these sculptural installations draws out one of the critical tensions at play in the form of *7000 Oaks*: basalt is born of volcanic eruptions—a kind of warmth and energy contained in (and nullified by) a cold, hard, ancient-seeming vessel—whereas the oaks, planted in Kassel in their infancy, exude a force that is life-giving and restorative, potential yet to be realized.³² The forwards- and backwards-looking poles of *7000 Oaks* become even more saddled with cultural, historical, and

³¹ “Joseph Beuys: Actions, Vitrines, Environments: Room 8,” last access September 14, 2017, <http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/joseph-beuys-actions-vitrines-environments/joseph-beuys-actions-8>.

³² The cold-warmth dynamic in Beuys’s work has received extensive treatment in scholarly texts on the artist, and Strauss has noted its specific relevance to *7000 Oaks*: “At first, the basalt columns would dwarf the young oak seedlings. Over time, the oaks would achieve parity with the stones, and eventually surpass them. For Beuys, this illustrated one of his main sculptural principles—the passage from cold, crystalline form to warm, organic form—that was enacted over and over again in his work.” *From Head to Hand*, 35.

environmental trauma when considered in light of the gesture that Beuys carried out repeatedly to create the final iteration of *The End of the Twentieth Century*. Each time he hewed a chunk from a stele only to return it, cushioned by felt and clay, he created a wound in order to heal it. With *7000 Oaks*, he pairs the basalt, which suggests the wounds of history, with an oak that offers a means to scab it over—but the dyad is always already unresolved, as the oak, too, is a mixed sign of trauma and growth, a reminder that nations do not outgrow their wounds but rather grow into them.

The juxtaposition of two seemingly disparate elements, such as the oak and the basalt stele, is one structuring principle Beuys relies upon to create irresolvable tension within the work of art and to open it to free interpretation. One sees this strategy in the silencing felt that covers a grand piano in the well-known 1966 sculpture *Infiltration Homogen für Konzertflügel* (Infiltration Homogen for Piano), a wrapping gesture Beuys applied to other instruments and employed on his own person in the 1964 performance *Der Chef/The Chief*, in which he lay on the floor of René Block's gallery in Berlin for several hours, rolled up in felt sheets and intoning nonsense into a microphone. In contrast to the strategy of healing like with like, a homeopathic principle Beuys avowed and which many scholars have used as an interpretive model for his work, pitting materials with opposing values against one another can have the effect of fracturing the unity of the work and, in turn, the wholeness of its author and his intentions, as I argued in Chapter 2 with relation to Beuys's multiples. Through Beuys's use of felt, *Infiltration Homogen* and *Der Chef* are both equally about sound or speech *and* silence or the failure to produce sound—the elements of the work nullify one other and at the same time magnify one another's symbolic content.

Elsewhere, Beuys's consistent use of unstable materials, such as animal fat and PVC, engenders in his work a constant state of flux and possible self-destruction, creating scenarios in which the works, even at the elemental level of form, exceed the artist's control, as a number of his multiples and singular works illustrate. Fat changes shape, shrinks, develops mold, and takes on a rancid odor—or, if it is conserved under exacting conditions, remains pristine. The aliveness of Beuys's chosen materials leaves open innumerable possibilities and creates rifts between works made at the same time with the same products but subjected to different conditions of care and conservation—rifts that can be significant enough to affect reception and the production of meaning as contemporary viewers encounter the work.

Re-approaching Beuys's oeuvre with this framework of openness at hand reveals other moments in which the artist embraces material and hermeneutic indeterminacy. The fundamental principle of Beuys's more than fifty vitrines, for example, is a democracy (or even an anarchy) of meaning, as they bring together diverse objects that rarely coalesce into narrative, argument, or image. Instead, the relations among objects in the vitrines remain perpetually unresolved, a set of associations that swirl around one another in various affective constellations. Moreover, just as Beuys played with the composition of *The End of the Twentieth Century*, so he also rearranged objects within his vitrines at will until they were sold—and sometimes even afterward, as he did with a number of the vitrines in the permanent installation *Block Beuys* at the Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt.³³ Far from being fixed, meaning was allowed to migrate and shift—and it continues to do so, particularly in cases where the vitrines include bits and pieces of

³³ Beuys's earliest biographer, Heiner Stachelhaus, has written that Beuys continued to visit *Block Beuys* to make changes to the installation until 1984, several years before his death. *Joseph Beuys*, 234. Specific alterations or expansions of vitrine contents executed by Beuys are enumerated in Gerhard Theewen, *Joseph Beuys: Die Vitrinen: Ein Verzeichnis* (Cologne: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walter König, 1993), 131.

organic material that age unpredictably, in concert or in contrast with adjacent objects. The layout of *Block Beuys*, a massive installation that unfolds over seven densely packed rooms of vitrines and sculptures, also encourages the active production of meaning on the part of the viewer as she walks from room to room, peering into one vitrine after another, struggling to draw connections among them.

Beuys also constructed larger scale installations, on par with *The End of the Twentieth Century*, that thematized indeterminacy through promiscuous historical association. Of particular relevance is the installation *Hinter dem Knochen wird gezählt – SCHMERZRAUM* (Behind the bone is counted – Pain Space), which was presented at Düsseldorf’s Galerie Konrad Fischer from December 1983 to February 1984 (Fig. 3.16). Art historian Gerald Schröder has illuminated the work’s many references, from concentration camp gas chamber to nuclear bunker, attributing these “after-images” not only to the work’s physical form—a room completely blanketed in lead plates, dimly lit with a single bulb hanging from the ceiling—but also to Beuys’s decision to list the work’s dates as spanning more than forty years, from 1941 to 1983.³⁴ Of course the installation had not actually been in progress since the year of Beuys’s voluntary entrance into the Luftwaffe—a year that was also, in collective consciousness, the same one in which the Nazi government ordered Jews to identify themselves by wearing the yellow Star of David; exterminations by gassing began at Auschwitz; and Hitler’s armies invaded the Soviet Union, escalating his Western European skirmishes to full-scale world war (and also, through his egoistic follies on the Eastern Front, spelling its inevitable end). The conceptual duration of production that accompanied *Schmerzraum*’s title suggests a period of shifting historical realities, beginning with the events of 1941, alerting viewers to the installation’s broad range of

³⁴ Gerald Schröder, *Schmerzensmänner: Trauma und Therapie in der Westdeutschen und Österreichischen Kunst der 1960er Jahre* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2011), 179-180.

connotations and, most importantly, giving them permission to relate the work to traumatic episodes in German history.

With *Schmerzraum*, Beuys has loosened the relationship between signifier and signified that he binds so tightly elsewhere. Single sheets of lead, iron, copper, and zinc often appear in Beuys's work, conveying various associations (conductivity, insulation, alchemy) related to their properties, but here the lead sheets, together with the spare light bulb, conjure traumatic images (concentration camps, prison cells, bunkers, torture rooms) that exceed the material's inherent or "Beuysian" meaning. It is with this same orientation towards polysemy that Beuys played with the arrangements of objects in his vitrines, and it is out of his desire to relate his work, however covertly, to Germany's past, present, and future that he chose a troubled symbol—the oak tree—to populate and complicate *7000 Oaks*. Like the lead panels of *Schmerzraum*, the oak was capable of calling up a long lineage of historical events and after-images. Beuys once said that he had lived through a large number of catastrophes, "the sum" of which was not yet concluded; to his mind, he lived them daily, in shades of trauma. *7000 Oaks*, like *Schmerzraum*, can only be understood as the sum of many catastrophes, not the least of which are those yet to come. With a life span of several hundred years, Beuys's oaks, as he well knew, would live to see catastrophes the shapes of which we have not even imagined.

7000 Oaks at Thirty

Schmerzraum's exaggerated production dates offer an apt analogy for a work like *7000 Oaks*, which has continued to grow for the more than thirty years that have passed since the project began—a period in which the trees have accrued new resonances. As *7000 Oaks* has itself become history, its latent contexts have been brought to the fore most poignantly through

subsequent iterations of *documenta*. Beuys's trees are now part of the very fabric of Kassel, making them an unavoidable element of the urban and environmental site that artists consider when they create work for the exhibition. The crucial legacy of Beuys's trees was overwhelmingly in evidence in 2012 at *documenta 13*, where at least six major installations, taking up the exhibition's directive to mine *documenta*'s past, referenced or incorporated *7000 Oaks*.³⁵

In the Orangerie near the Museum Fridericianum, the Italian artist Giuseppe Penone "planted" what is now a permanent monumental sculpture titled *Idee di Pietra* (Ideas of Stone), a massive artificial tree with a boulder nestled in its stubby branches (Figs. 3.17-18). One of a series of tree-stone hybrids Penone has been fabricating since 2004, *Idee di Pietra* engenders an initial sense of awe when viewers see from afar what looks like an asteroid improbably lodged in the maw of a denuded tree, an oddity whose spell is broken when the viewer comes closer and understands the work's artificiality, which prompts a different kind of awe at the powers of man to manufacture believable illusions and simulacra of nature. The work is a commentary on verisimilitude and the status of sculpture, which *7000 Oaks* in its literalness is not, but the duality between the "tree" and the "boulder" nods to the dialectic between Beuys's oaks and basalt steles, as the oaks insist on their organicism and lack of difference from their natural surrounds while at the same time their accompanying stones insist, in perpetuity, that the trees and stones are components of a man-made artwork.

³⁵ *Documenta 13*'s artistic director, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, nodded to the exhibition's emphasis on its location, and the many attendant histories of the site, in the curatorial statement distributed to the press before the exhibition's opening. She closes the statement by writing, "DOCUMENTA (13) takes a spatial or, rather, 'locational' turn, highlighting the significance of a physical place, but at the same time aiming for dislocation and for the creation of different and partial perspectives—an exploration of micro-histories on varying scales that link the local history and reality of a place with the world, and the worldly." The text remains accessible online at the exhibition's archived website: <http://d13.documenta.de/>.

Inside the Museum Fridericianum, one encountered hundreds of apple drawings, mounted wall-to-wall in a glassed-off gallery, created in the 1940s by the clergyman Korbinian Aigner, who had been sent to Dachau for his vocal resistance to the Nazi regime (Figs. 3.19-20). At the camp, Aigner obsessively documented and cultivated apples, including one that was posthumously named for him. As an extension of the drawings, Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *documenta 13*'s artistic director, together with American artist Jimmie Durham (who has been living and working in Europe since 1994), planted in the nearby Orangerie gardens an apple tree sapling derived from a tree Aigner had cultivated at Dachau. (Durham also designed labels for bottles of apple juice made from Korbinian apples, turning Aigner's soul-sustaining project into actual sustenance for *documenta* visitors.) What might have seemed merely an oblique reference to *7000 Oaks* was made more salient by the press photos of the apple tree planting, which echo the documentation of Beuys's installation of the first oak thirty years earlier on Friederichsplatz (Fig. 3.21).³⁶ Durham and Christov-Bakargiev thus insinuated the history of fascism into the physical landscape of Kassel and unearthed an image of nature—and love of nature—persisting in the face of unrelenting persecution. Through their press documentation, they also connected those concerns directly with the history of *documenta* and the latent context of *7000 Oaks*.

Characterizing the landscape as an instrument of cultural power, to paraphrase W.J.T. Mitchell, was the task taken up by Polish-born, Berlin-based artist Maria Loboda in *This work is dedicated to an emperor* (Fig. 3.22-23). In the Orangerie, Loboda staged a “moving forest” of twenty potted cypress trees arranged in military formations that changed over the course of the exhibition. The trees were re-arranged only under cover of darkness, allowing their slow

³⁶ I will readily admit that I might be overstating the resemblance here; it could be that all tree-plantings look more or less the same, and there is no direct evidence that Durham and Christov-Bakargiev aimed to mimic the Beuys photo, but given the exhibition's stated investment in both self-reflexive gestures and the mining of *documenta*'s sites, *7000 Oaks* must have been a salient reference point.

encroachment on nearby buildings—and the authoritarian undertones of the project—to go virtually unnoticed by day. The reality that the work’s meaningful reconfigurations would be unseen and perhaps even missed entirely resonates with the often-unacknowledged hints at a similarly menacing history in *7000 Oaks*. Elsewhere in the gardens, Pierre Huyghe’s much-discussed project *Untilled* populated a compost area with living oddities, including a pink-legged dog named Human, an actual human, a bee-covered sculpture, and an uprooted Beuys oak placed at the entrance to the installation, and a pile of stones that looks like a miniature version of Beuys’s 1982-87 pile of steles (Fig. 3.24-25). In cannibalizing a component of *7000 Oaks*, Huyghe literalizes *documenta*’s theme of mining the exhibition’s past, and pays homage—however morbidly—to Beuys’s influence on contemporary artistic practice. The damaged tree, which was removed from where it had once been planted, also served as a reminder of the vulnerabilities of *7000 Oaks*. The presence of a felled “Beuys tree,” lying prostrate on the ground and rotting in the sticky summer air, poignantly highlighted the preciousness of living things, which, no matter their status as art, are hardly immune to environmental change, organic deterioration, and cultural neglect—a set of conditions Beuys had aimed to highlight from the start. Huyghe’s inclusion of the dead tree made visible the constant maintenance that *7000 Oaks* requires, and the never-ending negotiation with its symbolic meaning that underlies the endlessly renewing commitment Kassel must make to keep the trees—and Beuys’s vision—alive.

American artist Mark Dion also incorporated a Beuys oak into his project for the Natural History Museum in Kassel, a stunningly beautiful redesign of their “wood library,” or *Xylotheque*, which encompasses 530 wooden volumes of different tree and shrub species crafted by the city’s park administrator at the end of the eighteenth century (Fig. 3.26). In addition to designing a custom hexagonal cabinet to hold the existing artifacts, Dion also added six volumes

representing the six continents, crafting the European volume, marked “Kassel,” from the remains of a dead Beuys oak (Fig. 3.27). Dion’s work, which often plays on the tradition of the *Wunderkammer*, both celebrates and questions the classificatory systems that govern our relationships with the world around us. Carving a tree book from the material remains of a Beuys oak casts *7000 Oaks* in an entirely new light, connecting it with the history of rationalist attempts to master nature and harness it for the purposes of human knowledge and advancement—a history, one could say, echoing Adorno and Horkheimer, that marches from the laboratories of the Enlightenment straight to the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Given that many of Beuys’s detractors bemoan his retrograde appeals to mysticism and pre-Enlightenment science and philosophy, the inclusion of a Beuys oak in a contemporary project that looks skeptically upon scientific practice imbricates Beuys in the kind of rationalist approach to nature that he might have vocally disavowed, while also positing, by contrast, that our dismissal of pre-Enlightenment approaches to nature might be equally short-sighted.

The most affecting project to make reference to *7000 Oaks* at *documenta 13* was also perhaps the least visible: a site-specific sound installation by the Canadian duo Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller titled *Forest (for a thousand years...)*. In a forested section of the Karlsau Park, Cardiff and Miller placed a set of speakers high up in the trees, circling a partially cleared area punctuated by flat-topped tree stumps (Fig. 3.28). The sound emanating from the speakers was audible from a distance, drawing visitors to the clearing with recorded rain, screams, and battle sounds (gunfire, tree-felling, horse hooves clacking) that alternated with singing by the Estonian Philharmonic Chamber Choir. Moments of silence in the twenty-eight-minute audio loop were filled with the ambient sounds of the forest itself: trees and leaves rustling, birds chirping, footsteps. At times the difference between soundtrack and ambient sound was left

entirely ambiguous, merging the installation fully with its site and creating an immersive experience for those perched on the tree stumps, listening intently. Away from the bustle of *documenta*'s main venues, the installation was transfixing, offering a respite that was at once peaceful and deeply unsettling.

The trees surrounding the clearing were not components of *7000 Oaks*, but to think about trees and forest in Kassel is by necessity to relate one's project to Beuys and to the legacy of his now decades-old intervention into the landscape. In the case of *Forest (for a thousand years...)*, that association brings to the fore not just the beauty of nature that Beuys engaged, nor the values of environmental preservation he avowed, but rather the forest's role—not symbolically but literally—in World War II. One must only watch a handful of Holocaust films to internalize the dual role the forest played for Jews in Nazi Germany: the forest could as easily provide cover for the innocent as it could play host to scenes of mass murder, always carried out just far enough away from nearby towns to give residents plausible deniability. As a Jew, it was impossible to sit in the middle of the German forest, listening to the cacophonous sounds of war, and not think about what had happened less than a century ago. To not only save the German forest but to propagate it as an image, to affirm its symbolic importance as Beuys did with *7000 Oaks*, is to force the viewer to confront “all these questions.” The living nature of the project, so fitting as Beuys's last, embodies Hal Foster's description of the avant-garde as a “complex relay of anticipated futures and reconstructed pasts.”³⁷ It ensures in its very form that such provocations carry the weight of history into an unknowable future.

³⁷ Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 29.

Epilogue: Social Sculpture at 50

Beuys was active in local and national politics for nearly twenty years, from the founding of the German Student Party in 1967 until his death at age sixty-five in 1986. Given the centrality of his persona to his political projects, one might imagine that they subsided completely in the wake of Beuys's passing. Indeed, the German Student Party/Fluxus Zone West and its successor, the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum, no longer exist, but the Free International University lingers on, primarily through a small publishing firm run by Rainer Rappmann, who also hosts workshops and discussions around Beuys's ideas. Lacking Beuys's persona (and the cult following that gathered around it), such a project is radically different than what it once was, and as a result, operates outside of the institutions of art, save for occasional lectures in conjunction with Beuys exhibitions. Despite Beuys's influence on and participation in the founding of the West German Green Party, he has been absent from most mainstream histories of environmental political action in Germany, though the party has recently made some effort to acknowledge his contributions; several important Fluxus texts, including Jon Hendricks' *Fluxus Codex*, overcorrect by overstating his involvement, citing his establishment of the party as perhaps the greatest Fluxus victory—an irony, to be sure, given Beuys's noticeable exclusion from the compendium of Fluxus artists, performances, and objects that comprises the majority of the volume.

While the legacy of Beuys's relationship with the Green Party (and with Fluxus) has been mixed, his hope that *7000 Oaks* would spawn further tree-plantings around the globe

continues to be fulfilled. As the last chapter argued, *7000 Oaks* maintains a visible and palpable presence in Kassel, and Beuys's dream of seeing the project replicated elsewhere has advanced significantly. In addition to the 400 trees Beuys himself helped to plant in Bolognaro in 1984, the Dia Art Foundation planted a total of twenty-three trees (with steles) in the Chelsea neighborhood of New York in 1988 and 1996; the Walker Art Center worked with the indigenous Ojibwe community to plant 1,034 seedlings in northern Minnesota (with one tree planted in the Walker's public sculpture garden) in 1997; the Joseph Beuys Tree Partnership project planted 100 trees in Baltimore public parks and thirty trees with steles on the campus of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, in 2000; and an arts center in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, currently has plans underway for the planting of thousands of trees seeded from Beuys's original oaks.¹ Trees have even been planted in digital form on "Cosmos Island" in the virtual world *Second Life* as part of a performance by the artist duo Eva and Franco Mattes.

Of course, a great many of the artworks that Beuys produced in conjunction with his political activities also endure, having been acquired by major collectors and museums, ensuring their preservation and periodic (or in some cases permanent) exhibition. They do, to some extent, still communicate the tenets of social sculpture, although they mostly read as relics from an increasingly distant past. Beuys's penchant for highly degradable materials makes that ever more the case, and his work has been the subject of a number of recent conservation studies as museums desperately attempt to delay the inevitable. The rhetoric of creativity and imagination, which seemed radical in the 1960s and 70s but had already been turned trendy by New Age and corporate interests, has now been fully co-opted and distorted by the machinations of capitalism—yielding, among other results, the vexing, oft-used terms "creative industry" and

¹ Henri Neuendorf, "Beuys Land Art Project Resurrected in Scotland," *Artnet News*, January 21, 2015, <http://news.artnet.com/in-brief/beuys-land-art-project-resurrected-in-scotland-225710/>.

“creative economy.”² Creativity has lost, perhaps forever, the ring of subversive potential with which both Beuys and Herbert Marcuse had invested it; now, creativity is just another buzzword for productivity and innovation within the strictures of a society driven by capital. It’s what workplaces like those managed by Google, Facebook, and SpaceX attempt to foster with free snacks and open offices; they might indeed be interested in social change, but not necessarily through the individual freedom, thought, and heightened sense perception that Beuys espoused.

Creativity may no longer have revolutionary purchase, but Beuys’s notion of social sculpture—the idea that individual everyday actions can collectively change society—has had an enduring impact on contemporary art. His greatest legacy has been the adoption of social sculpture (or some form of it) by subsequent generations of artists engaged in what has variously been called “new genre public art,”³ “relational aesthetics,” “social practice art,” “participatory art,” and “collaborative art.” Post-Beuys, the premise of these approaches is that relations among participants constitute a work of art, whether they occur in temporary, constructed situations or

² See, for example, Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community and Everyday Life* (New York: Basic Books, 2002). Florida’s language is strikingly similar to Beuys’s (“we now have an economy powered by human creativity”), though their purposes could not be farther apart. In Claire Bishop’s writing on participatory practices that aim to foster creativity, she summarizes the problem thus: “Through the discourse of creativity, the elitist activity of art is democratized, although today this leads to business rather than to Beuys. The dehierarchizing rhetoric of artists whose projects seek to facilitate creativity ends up sounding identical to government cultural policy geared towards the twin mantras of social inclusion and creative cities.” *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso Books, 2012), 16.

³ In Suzanne Lacy’s edited volume *Mapping the Terrain*, which charts what she called “new genre public art,” an image of Beuys performing *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974) is reproduced right after the introduction with no caption or identifying information, and no mention of Beuys in that part of the text; he appears again only in the compendium of individual artists at the back, with a brief (error-laden) biographical sketch, but his unexplained presence at the beginning speaks volumes with regard to the iconicity of that performance and his role in planting the seeds for a certain kind of social practice in the United States. The oblique mentions of Beuys in Lacy’s book were recently expanded upon by Cara Jordan in her dissertation, “Joseph Beuys and Social Sculpture in the United States,” (PhD diss., City University of New York, 2017), which provides a detailed (if uncritical) account of Beuys’s work in order to set up a framework for understanding the claims made by Rick Lowe and Suzanne Lacy in their own socially engaged projects.

in longer-lasting arrangements determined by existing communities; the role of the artist in these situations varies from instigator or visionary, to administrator or bureaucrat, to collaborator or facilitator. In many cases, only a convention of naming or the presence of the artist as an actor delineates an activity as an artwork rather than a community development project, political or environmental activism, or alternative pedagogy. Whereas Beuys, I argue, insistently tethers his projects to art institutions by virtue of siting them in museums or creating art objects in conjunction with them, social practice art since Beuys has developed much more heterogeneously, with non-art spaces used just as often as art-specific spaces. A number of art historians have tried to make sense of such endeavors as artworks, whether by tracing the rise of the participatory through the increased importance of audience vis-à-vis performance art (Frazer Ward), theorizing communication as a formational aspect of the avant-garde that opens onto relational practices based in “discursive exchange and negotiation” (Grant Kester), or narrating the development of site-specificity as the notion of “site” morphs from a physical place to a social one (Miwon Kwon).⁴

Claire Bishop emerged in the early 2000s as one of the fiercest skeptics of such practices, mounting a compelling critique of Nicolas Bourriaud’s theorization of “relational aesthetics,” the term he coined to describe a diverse set of artistic practices in the 1990s that prioritized intersubjectivity and the collective articulation of meaning. Bourriaud sees such forms as potentially emancipatory and emblematic of democracy, but Bishop argues that the “microtopias” he valorizes in fact lack the antagonism essential to democratic discourse, becoming instead

⁴ Frazer Ward, *No Innocent Bystanders: Performance Art and Audience* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2012); Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); and Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004).

opportunities for networking and “togetherness” among those already included in the art world’s private community (thereby exacerbating the continued exclusion of all others).⁵

How does Beuys figure in these accounts of social practice and its discontents? Beuys was not particularly concerned with issues attendant to the specificity of site or community, which places him beyond the scope of Kwon’s book; neither Ward nor Kester consider Beuys, though he might well have made sense as a reference point in both of their studies, given his performance and discursive/pedagogical practices. Unlike many of the artists Ward and Kester discuss, Beuys brings along extra baggage—Rudolf Steiner, the Nazi question, authoritarianism, myth, etc.—that clouds his socio-political agenda, distracts from a discussion of his influence on subsequent generations of artists, and unnecessarily problematizes the task of a generalized theory of the aesthetic framework of social practice or participatory art. I suspect that many writers have chosen not to include Beuys in their accounts because there has been no comprehensive, convincing account of Beuys’s social sculpture to draw upon, and therefore little established ground from which to spring to an assessment of legacy.

Bishop is an exception, and she comes back to Beuys a number of times in her writing, in large part because she wants to privilege socially-engaged projects that work not only “on the level of social intervention” but also, and more importantly, “on the level of art.”⁶ Social projects that work as art often provoke effects—“discomfort and frustration, along with absurdity, eccentricity, doubt, or sheer pleasure”—that might be in direct tension with the work’s more “legible intentions,” such as the relinquishing of authorship in the interests of collaboration and

⁵ Claire Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics,” *October* 110 (Autumn 2004): 51-79.

⁶ Bishop makes this distinction in “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics” and applies it further in “The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents,” *Artforum* (February 2006): 178-183.

collectivity.⁷ Bishop likes projects that are problematic in their outlook and implementation (mirroring the messiness of the real world, and the complexity of good works of art), and Beuys certainly fits the bill. Across her writings, Bishop invokes Thomas Hirschhorn as a prime example of an artist with a social practice that indeed works at the level of art in its provocation of all of the above values, and it seems to be no coincidence that Hirschhorn's installations and social projects in turn point over and over again to Beuys. Hirschhorn, too, speaks obtusely (in German or idiosyncratic English, which compounds the problem), lectures widely, often draws blackboard diagrams to explain his political vision, publishes prodigious political propaganda in the spaces of his exhibitions, and uses rhetorical flourishes—speaking of his “love” for certain historical figures, for example—that recall Beuys's own.⁸ Hirschhorn's own understanding of the role of art in social formation departs from Beuys's dependence on Romantic aesthetic ideology, but he extends Beuys's interests in developing empathy and creativity, and in undermining the predominance of economic capital as the force that shapes (and corrupts) the world around us.⁹

Bishop's account of Beuys is further developed in her 2012 book *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, in which she names him as the single greatest influence on contemporary socially engaged art, “intersecting artistic goals with social, political

⁷ Bishop, “The Social Turn,” 181.

⁸ Bishop does not make connections between the two artists explicit, but that task is central to Lisa Lee's dissertation, “Sculpture's Condition / Conditions of Publicness: Isa Genzken and Thomas Hirschhorn” (Princeton University, 2012). Lee positions Beuys as Hirschhorn's forebear in his redefinitions of sculpture as opening onto the public sphere. Hirschhorn and Beuys also share the distinction of having social projects funded by the Dia Art Foundation, which administered Beuys's *7000 Oaks* in the 1980s and helped to mount Hirschhorn's *Gramsci Monument* in New York in 2013.

⁹ Contending fully with Hirschhorn's larger project would take us far from the terrain of this epilogue, though I do want to note briefly that one of the major ways in which he departs from Beuys is in his critical considerations of the role of the image in contemporary culture, and the numbness to difficult pictures engendered by our engagements with technology.

and pedagogic ambitions.”¹⁰ Though she incorrectly claims that Beuys had moved on from “shamanic” performances in the 1970s (on the contrary, he continued such performances until the very end of his career), she also wants to distinguish Beuys’s example from contemporary practices by pointing to Beuys’s persona as a defining characteristic of his pedagogic work—a characteristic that has fallen away from subsequent developments in socially engaged art, as “today’s artists, by contrast, are less likely to present themselves as the central pedagogic figure.”¹¹

But in relegating persona to the past, and to the figure of Beuys in particular, Bishop misses one of the primary ways in which Beuys’s legacy has pervaded the work of younger generations of artists. What is absent from the work of socially engaged artists today (with the exception of Hirschhorn first and foremost) is an insistent or explicit aesthetic ideology; what remains consistent, however, is persona and indeed the centrality of the charismatic artist to the projects he or she carries out—which are often only possible at a bureaucratic or even curatorial level because the artist is personable, compelling, (in)genius. I am thinking here of a few examples: the late German artist Christoph Schlingensiefel named Beuys as an influence many times, and aimed to make theater once again a site of social engagement, in part through confronting the legacy of Richard Wagner and the *Gesamtkunstwerk*; despite how heavy and potentially dreary that sounds, Schlingensiefel managed to inject his work with the humor, irony, and vulgarity often hinted at in Beuys’s work but left obscured. Schlingensiefel also ran a satirical political party (*Chance 2000*) and convinced the general publics of Germany and Austria to participate in all manner of political actions that they may or may not have realized were

¹⁰ Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (New York: Verso, 2012), 244.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

intended to be elaborate jokes—a set of circumstances only possible because of his incredible TV-ready charisma. Tania Bruguera, although not as physically present in her projects as Beuys and Schlingensief, lectures widely and courts controversy at home in Cuba and abroad, relying on media outcry (negative in Cuba, positive elsewhere) to publicize her endeavors. She uses the term “hyperreal” to describe her performances and interventions, by which she means that she aims to create situations in which spectators are confused, at least at first, as to whether they are participating in a work of art or real life—a distinction that would clarify the stakes and the consequences of participation and non-participation.¹² To be sure, not all of Bruguera’s work has this “hyperreal” quality, but when it does, her desire to set into motion a situation involving real people who are submitting themselves, perhaps unwittingly, to manipulation, puts us not too far afield from the charismatic work of a Beuysian shaman.

We find ourselves in similar territory, differently inflected, when we confront the work of Theaster Gates, perhaps the most visible contemporary artist working with relational or participatory practices today. It is no coincidence that, when Gates was asked to contribute a new work to the sculpture park that reopened in 2017 behind the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, he and the curators chose to site it directly next to their Beuys oak. Gates, who always names as a direct influence the Houston-based artist Rick Lowe, who in turn names Beuys as a key model, has dedicated himself to revitalizing a section of his own neighborhood on the South Side of Chicago.¹³ The ongoing work, called Dorchester Projects, consists of a series of renovated houses along a single city block; the buildings now function as semi-public spaces for formal

¹² Lecture by Tania Bruguera, Roski School of Fine Art and Design, University of Southern California, January 24, 2017.

¹³ John Colapinto, “The Real-Estate Artist,” *The New Yorker* (January 20, 2014). Rick Lowe, who has long managed Project Row Houses in Houston, makes his indebtedness to Beuys explicit in the organization’s mission statement on his website, last accessed September 1, 2017, <https://projectrowhouses.org/about/mission-history/>.

gatherings and performances, as well as everyday havens for members of the community. Gates describes himself quite openly as a “hustler,” recognizing that he can only fund his work if he feeds the art market’s perverse and unending hunger for objects; he sells large fragments of renovated homes and reworked, decommissioned fire hoses, giving them titles that evoke black culture and play into a certain desire to collect politically-inflected art.

Gates’s dealings with the art world are imbued with self-consciousness about race and class, not to mention a biting cynicism about the motivations of anyone who donates to his projects—which nevertheless has not prevented a healthy number of collectors from giving him money. Several years ago, I observed a performance Gates gave at the Studio Museum in Harlem to an intimate audience comprised exclusively of art-world glitterati, including collectors, gallerists, curators, and museum directors. He took sporadic, enigmatic notes on a whiteboard, and spontaneously broke into a slave hymn between questions about Dorchester Projects and his plans for the Prospect triennial in New Orleans, which would involve a taxi service bankrolled by a collector. Everyone laughed and smiled wryly throughout the performance, indicating that they, too, were in on the joke of the (black) artist-as-hustler. Gates’s persona had the paradoxical effect of putting everyone at ease and setting everyone on edge, creating an atmosphere of tension despite the insider status of the crowd.

Overall, Gates’s savvy game-playing has proven effective: Dorchester Projects continues to grow and evolve, seemingly remaking at least one small corner of a neighborhood that had been left to rot for nearly a half-century.¹⁴ Whether Gates indeed believes that art is a revitalizing social force or simply manipulates his connection to the art world (which he enjoys largely because he started his career as a ceramicist) in order to fund his projects is up for debate;

¹⁴ There is much to be said about the art world’s gentrifying role in major cities in America and Europe. Gates’s project is not immune to those concerns, though they exceed the scope of the present discussion.

regardless of intention, he uses art as a medium to enact social change that would otherwise be within the purview of city governance, flipping the art-politics formula laid out by Beuys.

As of late, however, ethical questions have plagued Gates's work. A recent exposé regarding Gates's control of his various governmentally and grant-funded organizations alleged mismanagement, systemic abuse, and even fraud, exposing, at the very least, that the effects of Gates's projects are not being measured or reported. Praise of Gates in the mainstream media (and in curatorial settings) has stemmed less from the actual work he does than from the fact that he's able to do it at all, and that brings us back to the issue of persona. In engaging these questions, we are, in a sense, in the ethical terrain that Bishop finds tedious or outmoded in contemporary criticism of social practice, but insofar as the potential ethical problems of Gates's work stem from what he is able to perform publicly through a charismatic persona, we also find ourselves in the terrain of old questions about aura, authorship, and authority.

At the risk of overstating Beuys's importance, I will nevertheless offer the argument that more critical, compelling accounts of Beuys's work, which fully acknowledge and attempt to wrestle with contradiction and tension within his oeuvre, and particularly within his social-sculptural projects, would help us to come to terms with the situation in which we now find ourselves. For so long, reception of Beuys has been split into the hagiographers and the polemicists, with very little middle ground. I have aimed in this dissertation to articulate the ways in which Beuys himself often occupied an ambiguous position, ambivalent about his own effectiveness, about his role as an artist, about his relationship with German history and the Nazi past. Critics writing at the time of Beuys's emergence as a political artist scarcely had the theoretical tools to unpack what he was doing, and to see how he might be staging the failures of aesthetic ideology anew. Today, despite much ink spilled over social practice, I fear we are no

better off in our attempts to evaluate participatory, socially-emancipatory projects as they are unfolding in real time, perhaps because art has indeed become as unwieldy and uncontained as life itself. This dissertation had the benefit of a (more or less) finite body of work to evaluate and from which to tease productive tensions and moments of doubt and failure, with no damage done to an oeuvre already final. I wonder whether it is possible to acknowledge the limitations of projects witnessed in the present and yet still find a way to affirm the value of artistic ambitions toward social change, no matter how flawed.



Figure 0.1. Joseph Beuys with his students in a discussion forum in his classroom (Room 20), Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany, 1967. Photographer: Ute Klophaus.



Figure 0.2. Body of slain protester Benno Ohnesorg, June 2, 1967, Berlin, Germany.
Photographer: Jürgen Henschel.

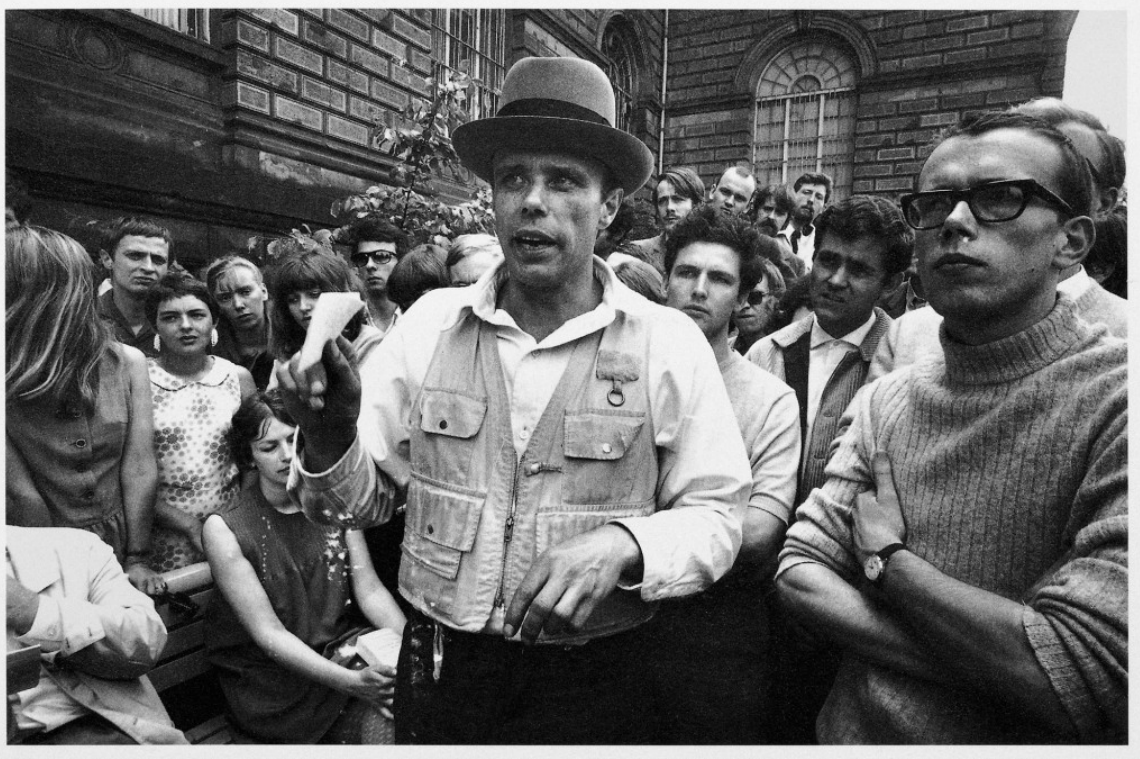


Figure 0.3. Joseph Beuys following the founding of the German Student Party, front lawn of the Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, Germany, 1967. Photographer: Volker Krämer.

JOSEPH BEUYS:

Joseph Beuys Lebenslauf Werklauf

- 1921 Kleve Ausstellung einer mit Heftpflaster zusammengezogenen Wunde
- 1922 Ausstellung Molkerei Rindern b. Kleve
- 1923 Ausstellung einer Schnurrbarttasse (Inhalt Kaffee mit Ei)
- 1924 Kleve Öffentliche Ausstellung von Heidenkindern
- 1925 Kleve Documentation : "Beuys als Aussteller"
- 1926 Kleve Ausstellung eines Hirschführers
- 1927 Kleve Ausstellung von Ausstrahlung
- 1928 Kleve Erste Ausstellung vom Ausheben eines Schützengrabens
Kleve Ausstellung um den Unterschied zwischen lehmigem Sand und sandigem Lehm klarzumachen
- 1929 Ausstellung an Dschingis Khans Grab
- 1930 Donsbrüggen Ausstellung von Heidekräutern nebst Heilkräutern
- 1931 Kleve Zusammengezogene Ausstellung
Kleve Ausstellung von Zusammenziehung
- 1933 Kleve Ausstellung unter der Erde (flach untergraben)
- 1940 Posen Ausstellung eines Arsenal (zusammen mit Heinz Sielmann, Hermann Ulrich Asemissen und Eduard Spranger)
Ausstellung Flugplatz Erfurt-Bindersleben
Ausstellung Flugplatz Erfurt-Nord
- 1942 Sewastopol Ausstellung meines Freundes
Sewastopol Ausstellung während des Abfangens einer JU 87
- 1943 Oranienburg Interimausstellung (zusammen mit Fritz Rolf Rothenburg + und Heinz Sielmann)
- 1945 Kleve Ausstellung von Kälte
- 1946 Kleve warme Ausstellung
Kleve Künstlerbund "Profil Nachfolger"
Happening Hauptbahnhof Heilbronn
- 1947 Kleve Künstlerbund "Profil Nachfolger"
Kleve Ausstellung für Schwerhörige
- 1948 Kleve Künstlerbund "Profil Nachfolger"
Düsseldorf Ausstellung im Bettenhaus Pillen
Krefeld Ausstellung "Kullhaus" (zusammen mit A.R.Lynen)

- 1949 Heerdt Totalausstellung 3 mal hintereinander
Kleve Künstlerbund "Profil Nachfolger"
- 1950 Beuys liest im "Haus Wylermeer" Finnegans Wake
Kranenburg Haus van der Grinten "Giocondologie"
Kleve Künstlerbund "Profil Nachfolger"
- 1951 Kranenburg Sammlung van der Grinten Beuys: Plastik und
Zeichnung
- 1952 Düsseldorf 19. Preis bei "Stahl und Eisbein" (als Nachschlag
Lichtballett von Piene)
Wuppertal Kunstmuseum Beuys: Kreuzfixe
Amsterdam Ausstellung zu Ehren des Amsterdam-Rhein-Kanal
Nijmegen Kunstmuseum Beuys: Plastik
- 1953 Kranenburg Sammlung van der Grinten Beuys: Malerei
- 1955 Ende von Künstlerbund "Profil Nachfolger"
- 1956-57 Beuys arbeitet auf dem Felde
- 1957-60 Erholung von der Feldarbeit
- 1961 Beuys wird als Professor für Bildhauerei an die Staatliche
Kunstakademie Düsseldorf berufen
Beuys verlängert im Auftrag von James Joyce den "Ulysses"
um 2 weitere Kapitel
- 1962 Beuys : das Erdklavier
- 1963 FLUXUS Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf
An einem warmen Juliabend stellt Beuys anlässlich eines
Vortrages von Allan Kaprow in der Galerie Zwirner Köln
Kolumbakirchhof sein warmes Fett aus.
Joseph Beuys Fluxus Stallausstellung im Hause van der Grinten
Kranenburg Niederrhein
- 1964 Documenta III Plastik Zeichnung
- 1964 Beuys empfiehlt Erhöhung der Berliner Mauer um 5 cm
(bessere Proportion!)
-

Beuys empfiehlt Erhöhung der Berliner Mauer um 5 cm (bessere Proportion!); 1964 Beuys "VEHICLE ART"; Beuys Die Kunstpille; Aachen; Festival Kopenhagen; Beuys Filzbilder und Fetten. WARUM?; Freundschaft mit Bob Morris u. Yvonne Rainer; Beuys Mausezahn happening Düsseldorf-New York; Beuys Berlin "Der CHEF"; Beuys das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet. 1964 Beuys Braunräume; Beuys Hirschjagd(hinten); 1965 und in uns...unter uns ... landunter, Galerie Parnass Wuppertal; Projekt Westmensch; Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf:...irgendein Strang...; Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf "Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt"; 1966 und hier ist schon das Ende von Beuys: Per Kirkeby "2,15"; Beuys Eurasia 32.Satz 1963 - René Block, Berlin-"...mit Braunkreuz"; Kopenhagen: Traekvogn Eurasia; Feststellung: der größte Komponist der Gegenwart ist das Contergankind; Division the Cross; Homogen für Konzertflügel(Filz); Homogen für Cello(Filz); Manresa mit Björn Nörgard, Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf; Beuys Der bewegte Isolator; Beuys Der Unterschied zwischen Bildkopf und Bewegkopf; Zeichnungen, Galerie St.Stephan, Wien; 1967 Darmstadt Joseph Beuys und Henning Christiansen "Hauptstrom"; Darmstadt Fettraum, Galerie Franz Dahlem, Aha-Straße; Wien Beuys und Christiansen: Eurasienstab 82 min fluxorum organum; Düsseldorf 21 Juni Beuys gründet die DSP deutsche Studentenpartei; 1967 Mönchengladbach (Johannes Cladders) Parallelprozess 1; Karl Ströher; DAS ERDTELEPHON; Antwerpen Wide White Space Gallery: Bildkopf - Bewegkopf(Eurasienstab); Parallelprozess 2; DER GROSSE GENERATOR 1968 Eindhoven Stedelijk van Abbe Museum Jean Leering. Parallelprozess 3; Kassel Documenta IV Parallelprozess 4; München Neue Pinakothek; Hamburg ALLENDE (Kunstverein); Nürnberg RAUM 563 x491x563 (Fett); Ohrenjorn Stuttgart, Karlsruhe, Braunschweig, Würm-Glazial (Parallelprozess 5); Frankfurt/M: Filz TV II Das Bein von Rochus Kowallek nicht in Fett ausgeführt (JOM)! Düsseldorf Filz TV III Parallelprozess; Köln Galerie Intermedia: VAKUUM --- MASSE (Fett) Parallelprozess ..Gulo borealis.. für Bazon Brock; Johannes Stüttgen FLUXUS ZONE WEST Parallelprozess - Düsseldorf, Staatliche Kunstakademie, Eiskellerstrasse 1: LEBERVERBOT; Köln Galerie Intermedia: Zeichnungen 1947-1956; Weihnachten 1968: Überschneidung der Bahn von BILDKOPF mit der Bahn von BEWEGKOPF im All (Space) Parallelprozess - 1969 Düsseldorf Galerie Schmela FOND III; 12.2.69 Erscheinung von BEWEGKOPF über der Kunstakademie Düsseldorf; Beuys übernimmt die Schuld für Schneefall vom 15. bis zum 20. Februar; Berlin - Galerie René Block: Joseph Beuys und Henning Christiansen konzert: ich versuche dich freizulassen (machen) -
 Konzertflügeljom (Bereichjom).

Berlin: Nationalgalerie; Berlin: Akademie der
Künste: Sauerkrautpartitur - Partitur essen!
Mönchengladbach: Veränderungskonzert mit Hen-
ning Christiansen; Düsseldorf Ausstellung Kunst-
halle (Karl Ströher); Luzern Fettraum (Uhr);
Basel Kunstmuseum Zeichnungen; Düsseldorf PRO-
SPEKT: ELASTISCHER FUSS PLASTISCHER FUSS.

«Lebenslauf Werklauf» ist zunächst für das Biographien-Heft zum Aachener
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ANTIART/L'AUTRISME/ART TOTAL/REFLUXUS

festival der neuen kunst

20.Juli 1964 aachen th

ausgeführt von ERIC ANDERSEN, JOSEPH BEUYS, BAZON BROCK,
STANLEY BROWN, HENNING CHRISTIANSEN, ROBERT FILLIOU,
LUDWIG GOSEWITZ, ARTHUR KOEPCKE, TOMAS SCHMIT, BEN VAUTIER,
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Paperback 1965, S. 428 f.; mit einer zweiten Erweiterung zu 1964-67 im Katalog
der Ausstellung «Science fiction», Kunsthalle Bern Juli - September 1967
(nachgedruckt im Katalog der Beuys-Ausstellung Mönchengladbach Herbst
1967 und in den beiden Katalogen der Ausstellung «Sammlung 1968 Karl
Ströher» München 1968, Hamburg 1968 und Berlin-Düsseldorf 1969); mit dritter
Erweiterung zu 1967-69 im Katalog «Blockade '69», Galerie René Block Berlin;
um 3 handschriftliche Zeilen erweitert im Katalog der Ausstellung «Live in
your head» («When attitudes become form») Kunsthalle Bern Frühjahr 1969
(nachgedruckt im Katalog «Düsseldorfer Szene» Luzern Sommer 1969); im vor-
liegenden Katalog kommen nochmals einige Zeilen neu hinzu (alle Erweiter-
ungen von Beuys selber vorgenommen).

1967 Mönchengladbach (Johannes Cladders) ⊕
 Parallelprozess 1 Karl Ströher ~~Zeitgeist~~
~~Jugend~~ DAS ERDTELEPHON
 Antwerpen Vide mit Space Gallery: BILDKOPF—
 — BEWEGKOPF (EURASIENSTAB) Parallelprozess 2
 DER GROSSE GENERATOR
 1968 Eindhoven Nedelijk-van-Abbe-Museum
 Jan Leering. Parallelprozess 3
 Kassel Documenta IV Parallelprozess 4
 München Neue Pinakothek
 Hamburg (ALMENDE) (Kunstverein)
 Nürnberg RAUM 563 x 491 x 563 (FETT)
 Olof Jonsson, Ingeborg, Karlström
 Ravensburg, Videm-Glazial (Parallel-
 prozess 5)
 Frankfurt/107: Film TV II Das Sein von Rockus korrelat
 nicht-oder-geficht (JOM)!
 Düsseldorf: Film TV III Parallelprozess →
 Köln Galerie Intermedia: VAKUUM ← → MASSE
 (JOM)
 Parallelprozess →
 ∞ gulo borealis ∞ für Bazon Brock
 Johannes Stüttgen FLUXUS ZONE WEST
 Parallelprozess →
 Düsseldorf, Staatliche Kunstakademie, Eiskeller
 Raum 1: LEBERVERBOT
 Köln: Galerie Intermedia: Zeichnungen 1947-1956
 Weihnachten 1968: Überkreuzung
 der Bahn von BILDKOPF mit der Bahn von
 BEWEGKOPF im All (Space) Parallelprozess
 1969 Düsseldorf Galerie Schmela FOND III
 12.2.69: Erscheinung von BEWEGKOPF über der Kunstakademie
 Düsseldorf
 Berlin → Galerie René Block Joseph Beuys' neue Kennung Kunstverein
 Konzept: Die unimäre über fünfmal mehr (mischen) Konzept: Beuys' neue Kennung

Figure 0.4. Joseph Beuys, *Lebenslauf—Werklauf* (Life Vita—Work Vita), originally published in the exhibition catalogue for *Festival der neuen Kunst*, Aachen, Germany, 1964, republished (with the handwritten addition) in the exhibition catalogue for *Blockade 69*, Galerie Block, Berlin, Germany, 1969.

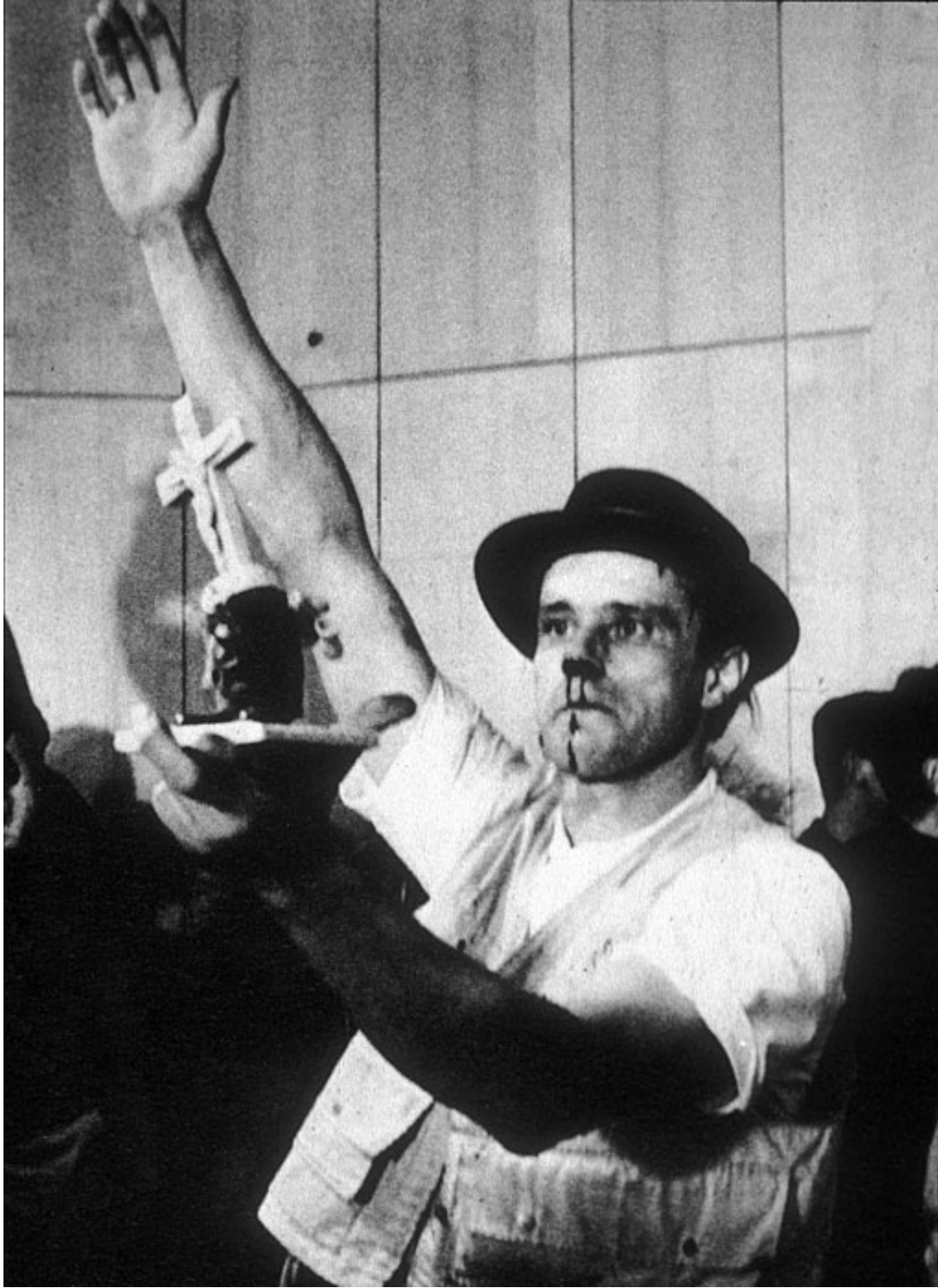


Figure 0.5. Joseph Beuys performing *Kukei/Akopee-nein/Brown Cross/Fat Corners/Model Fat Corner*, *Festival der neuen Kunst*, Aachen, Germany, 1964. Photographer: Heinrich Riebesehl.

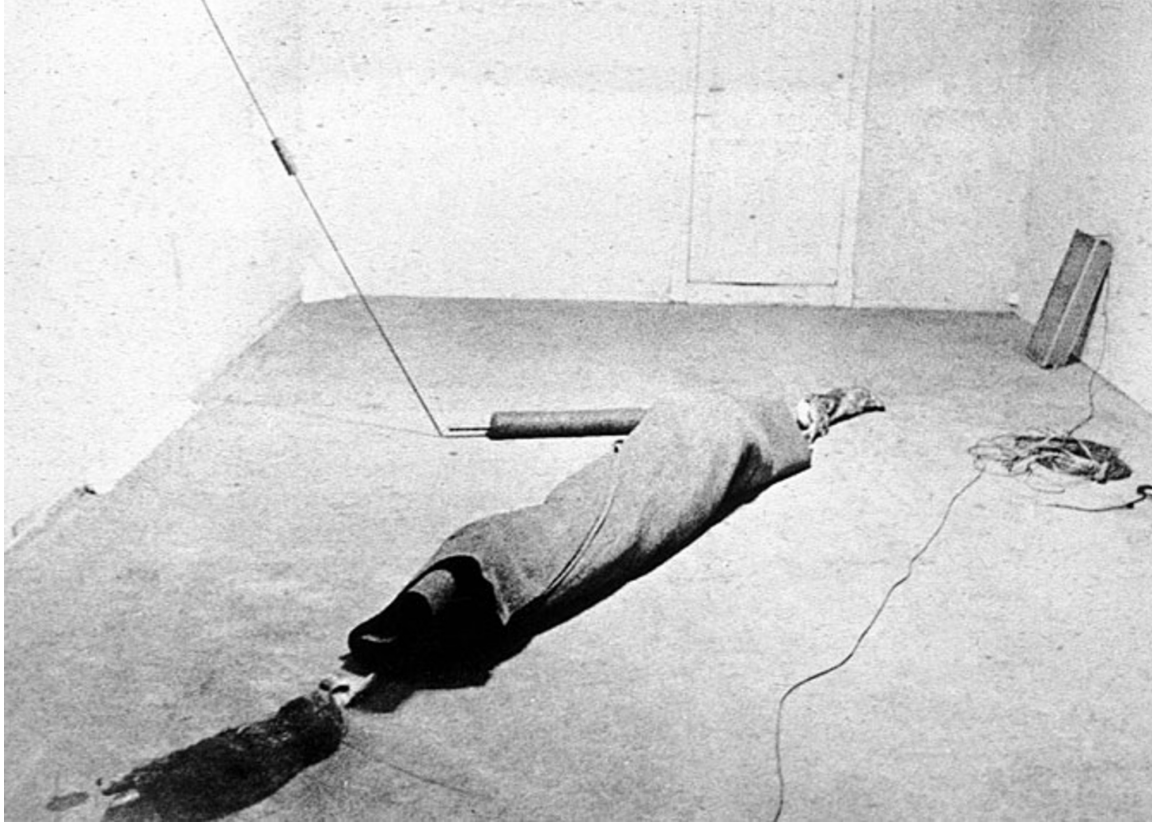


Figure 0.6. Joseph Beuys performing *Der Chef: Fluxus Gesang* (The Chief: Fluxus Song), December 1963, Galerie René Block, Berlin, Germany.



Figure 0.7. Photograph and film still of Joseph Beuys performing *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* (How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare), November 26, 1965, Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, Germany.



Figure 0.8. Joseph Beuys performing *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* (How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare), November 26, 1965, Galerie Schmela, Düsseldorf, Germany.

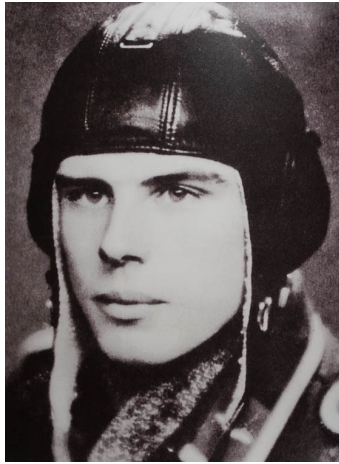


Figure 0.9. Piotr Uklanski, Installation view and detail of *Real Nazis*, 2017, *documenta 14*, 2017, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 1.1. Joseph Beuys, *Beuys boxt für direkte Demokratie* (Beuys Boxes for Direct Democracy), 1972. Publisher: Edition Staack, Heidelberg. Edition of 100, signed and numbered.

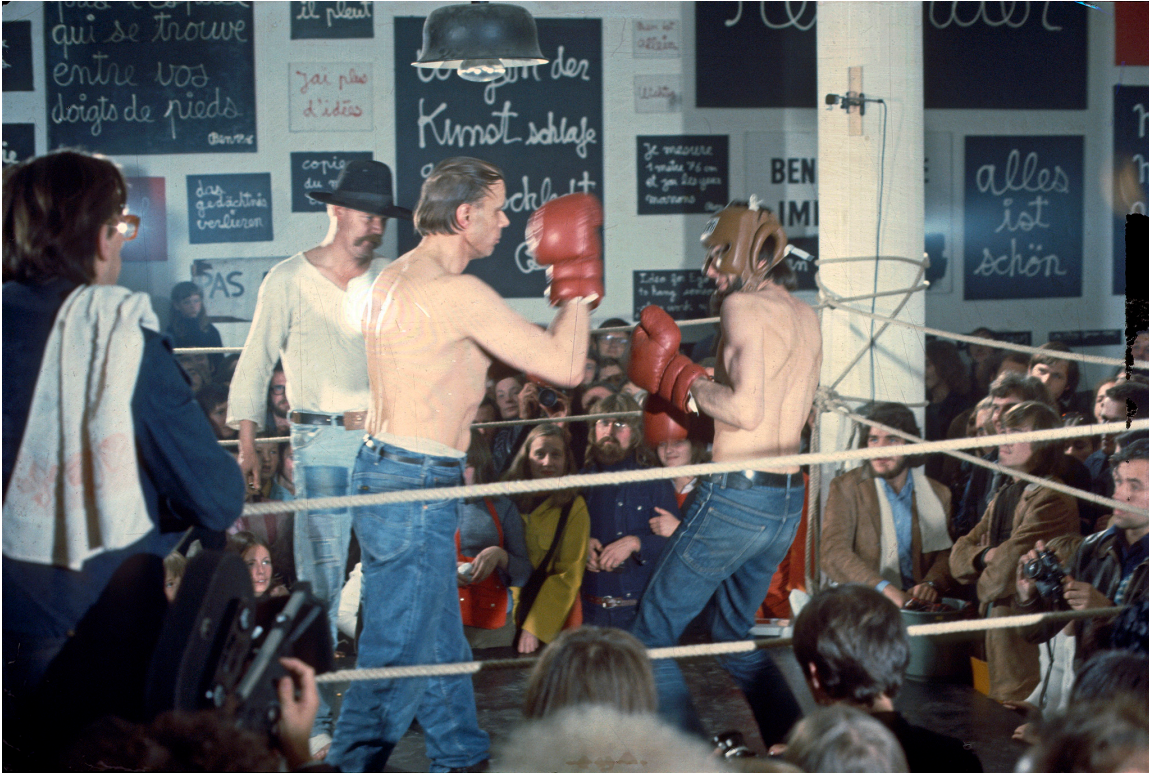


Figure 1.2. Joseph Beuys and Abraham David Christian Moebuss, *Boxkampf für direkte Demokratie* (Boxing Match for Direct Democracy), October 3, 1972, *documenta 5*, Kassel, Germany. Photographer: Michael Ruetz.



Figure 1.3. Haus-Rucker-Co, *Oase Nr. 7* (Oasis No. 7), installation at *documenta 5*, Kassel, Germany, 1972. Photo: Carl Eberth. © documenta Archives

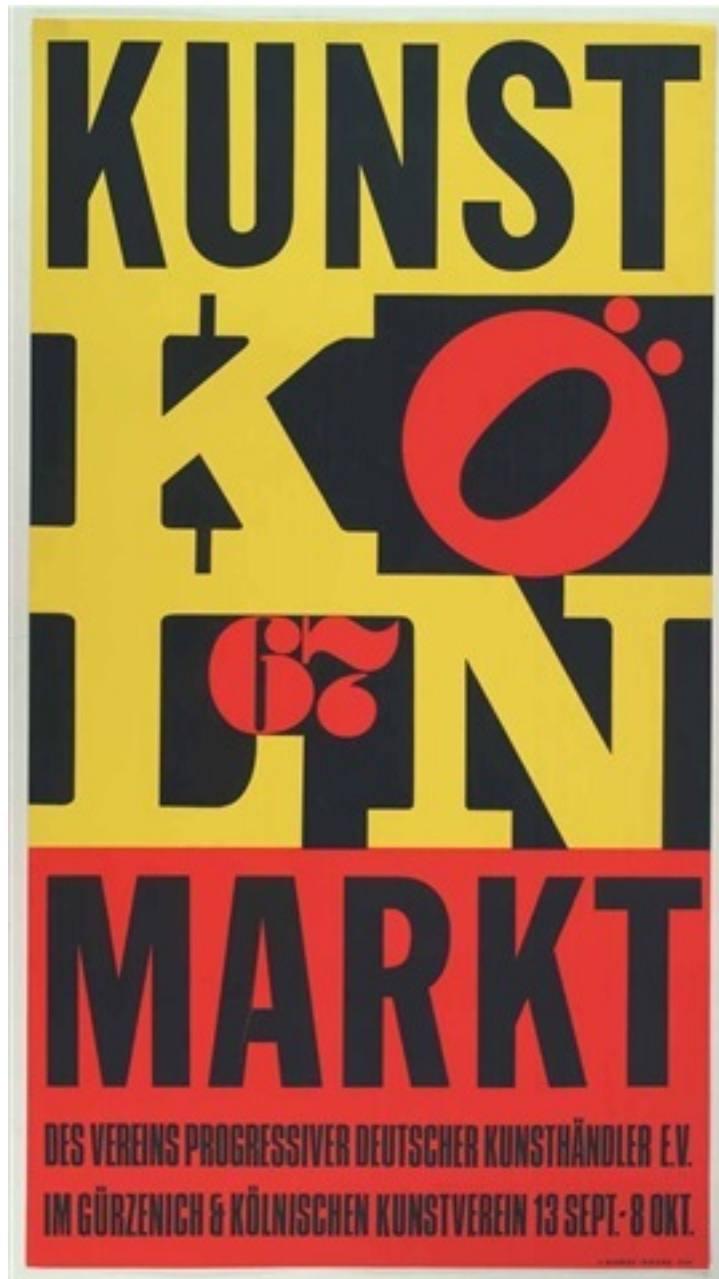


Figure 1.4. Robert Indiana, Advertising poster for the first Kölner Kunstmarkt (Cologne Art Fair), 1967.



Figure 1.5. Joseph Beuys (sitting at piano) performing *Siberische Symphonie* (Siberian Symphony) at the Festum-Fluxorum-Fluxus, February 1963, Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf, Germany.



Figure 1.6. Joseph Beuys performing *Das Schweigen des Marcel Duchamp wird überbewertet* (The Silence of Marcel Duchamp is Overrated), broadcast live in Germany on ZDF, December 11, 1964. Photographer: Manfred Tischer.

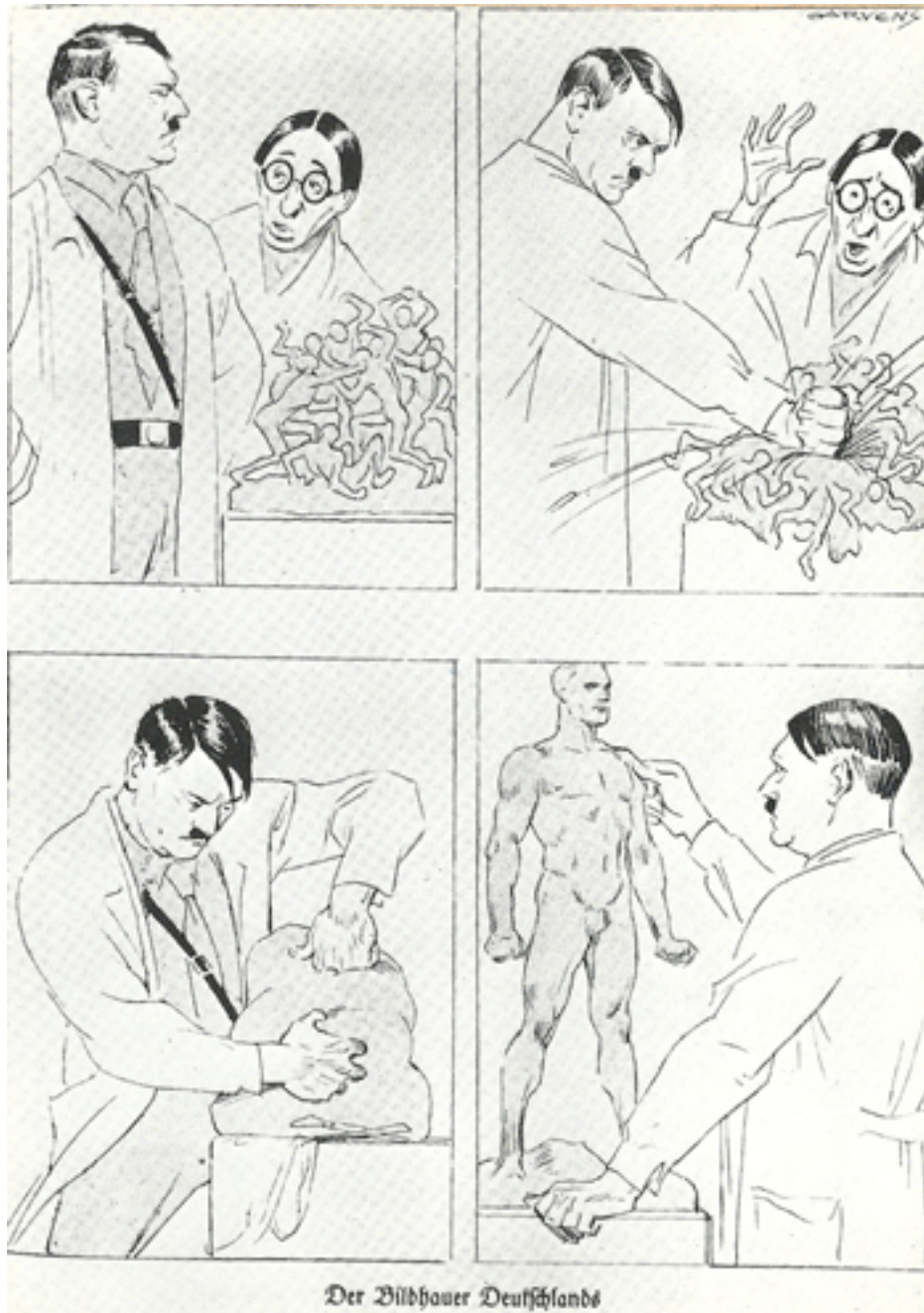


Figure 1.7. Anonymous, *Der Bildhauer Deutschland* (The Sculptor of Germany), published in the satirical magazine *Kladderadatsch* (Crash), December 1933. Reproduced in Eric Michaud, *The Cult of Art in Nazi Germany*, p. 80.

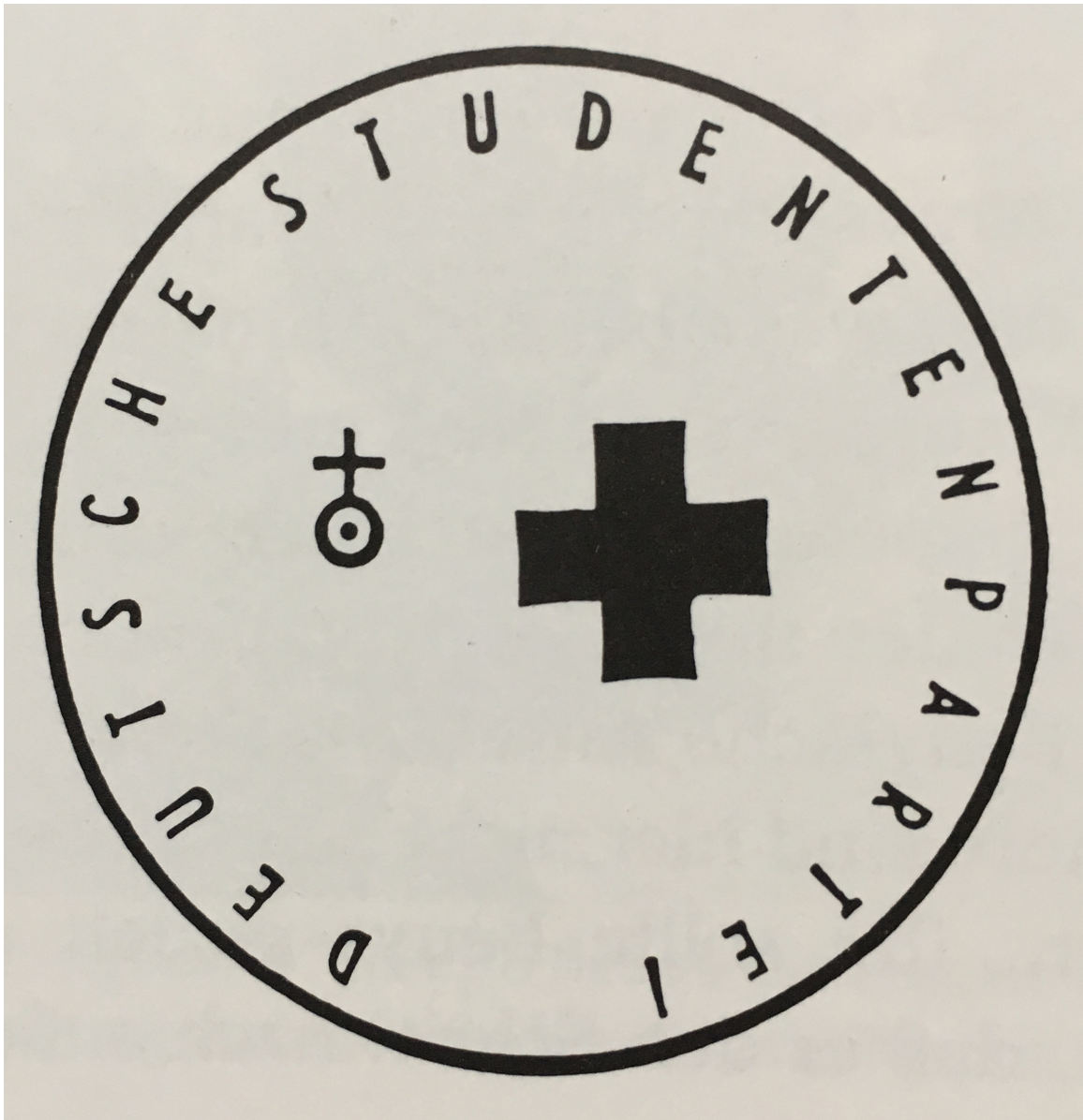


Figure 1.8. Joseph Beuys, *Deutsche Studentenpartei* (German Student Party) insignia, rubber stamp designed and fabricated 1967. Reproduced in *Joseph Beuys: Zeichnungen, Skulpturen, Objekte* (Joseph Beuys: Drawings, Sculptures, Objects), p. 162.

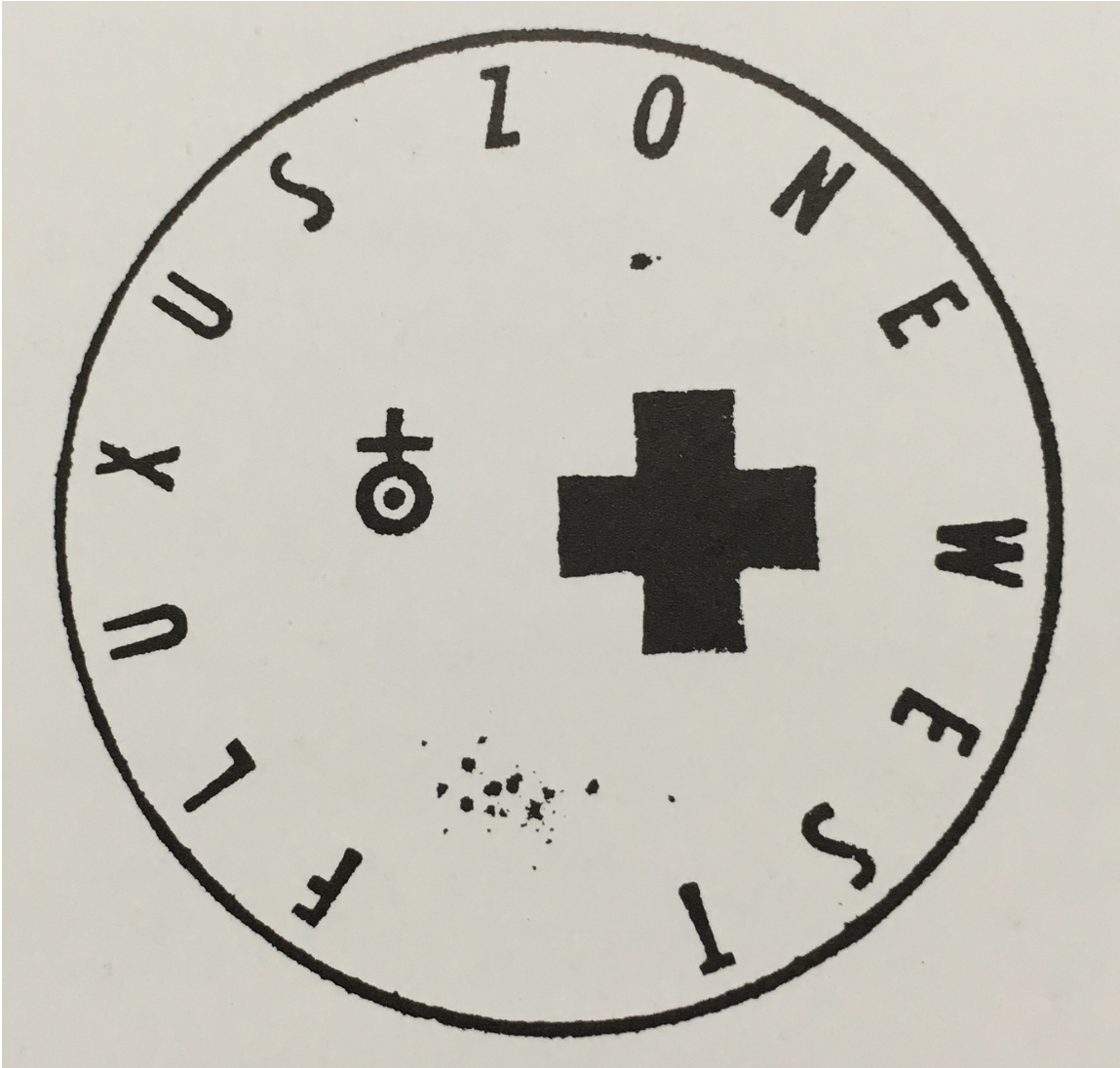
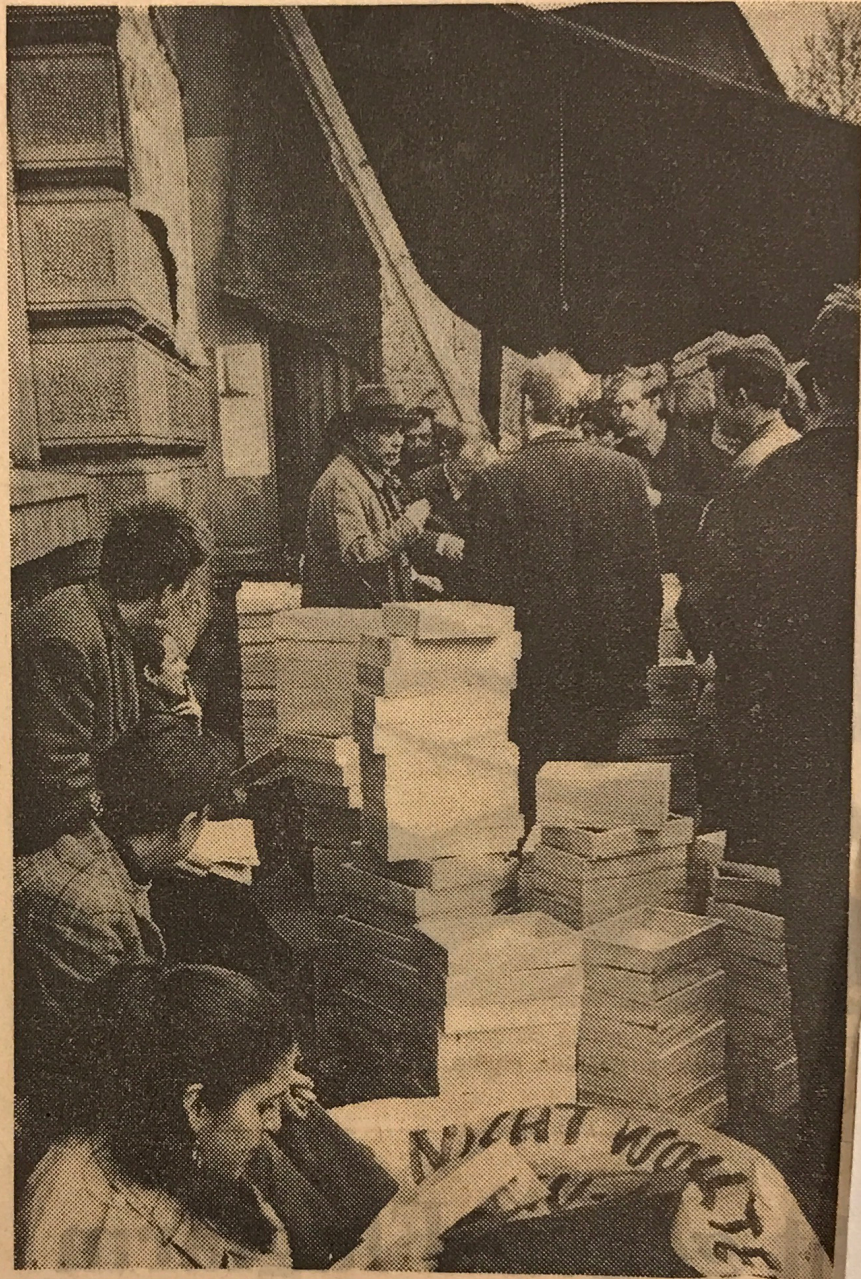


Figure 1.9. Fluxus Zone West insignia, rubber stamp designed and fabricated in 1968. Reproduced in *Joseph Beuys: Zeichnungen, Skulpturen, Objekte* (Joseph Beuys: Drawings, Sculptures, Objects), p. 170.



Figure 1.10. Katharina Sieverding, *Eigenbewegung 1967-69 (Lidl-Arbeitswoche, 5./6.5.1969)* (Proper Motion 1967-69 [LIDL Workweek, May 5-6, 1969), 1969.



Vor der geschlossenen Kunstakademie wurde gestern weiter diskutiert. Studenten hatten eine große Zeltplane am Eingang befestigt. Professor Beuys signierte einfache Holzkästen mit seinem Namen. Foto: Retzlaff



Figure 1.11. Joseph Beuys signing *Intuition*, 1969, front steps of the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Düsseldorf, Germany. Both photographs printed in Helga Meister, “Tore bleiben geschlossen, Intern wird der Fall Beuys diskutiert,” *Düsseldorfer Nachrichten*, May 9, 1969. Photographer of image 1 unknown; photographer of image 2: Ulrich Horn.



Figure 1.12. Joseph Beuys, *Intuition*, 1968. Publisher: VICE-Versand, Remscheid. Edition of approx. 12,000.



Figure 1.13. George Brecht, *Water Yam*, 1963. Publisher: Fluxus Editions, New York. Released in eight editions of variable size between 1963-2002.



Figure 1.14. Robert Filliou, *Ample Food for Stupid Thought*, 1965. Publisher: Something Else Press, Inc. Edition of 500, 104 boxed.



Figure 1.15. Joseph Beuys, *Evervess II I*, 1968, shown with and without lid. Publisher: Edition René Block. Edition of 40, unsigned and unnumbered.



Figure 1.16. Joseph Beuys, Exterior view of the office of the *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum), Düsseldorf, Germany, 1971.



Figure 1.17. Joseph Beuys, Interior view of the office of the *Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office for Direct Democracy through Referendum), Düsseldorf, Germany, 1971.

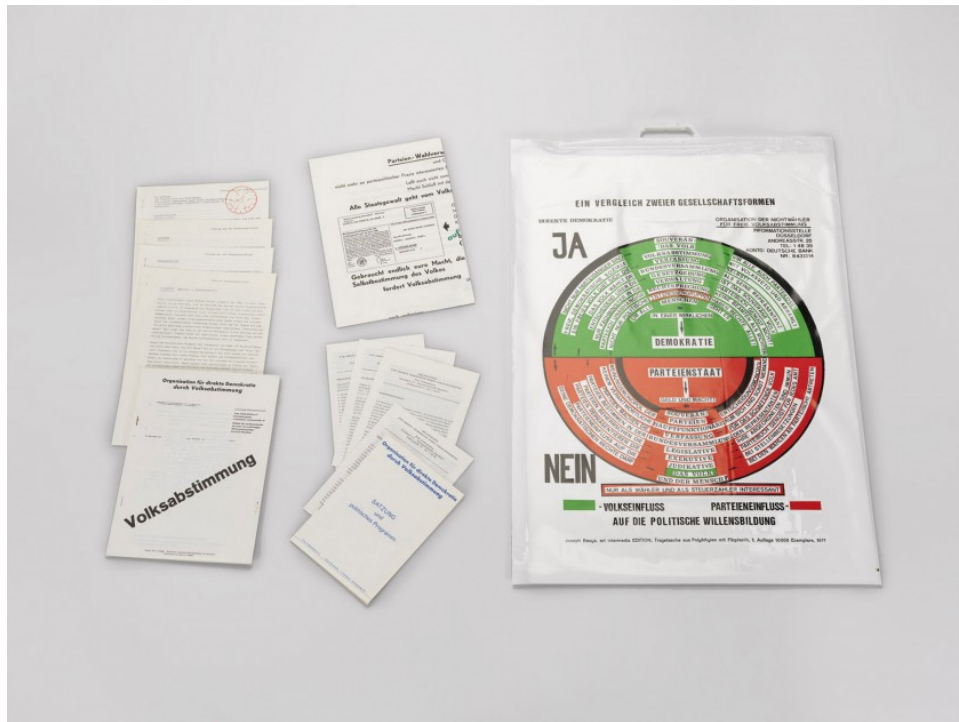


Figure 1.18. Joseph Beuys, Recto and verso of the multiple *So kann die Parteidiktatur überwunden werden* (How the Dictatorship of the Parties Can Be Overcome), 1971. Publisher: galerie art intermedia, Cologne. Edition of 10,000.

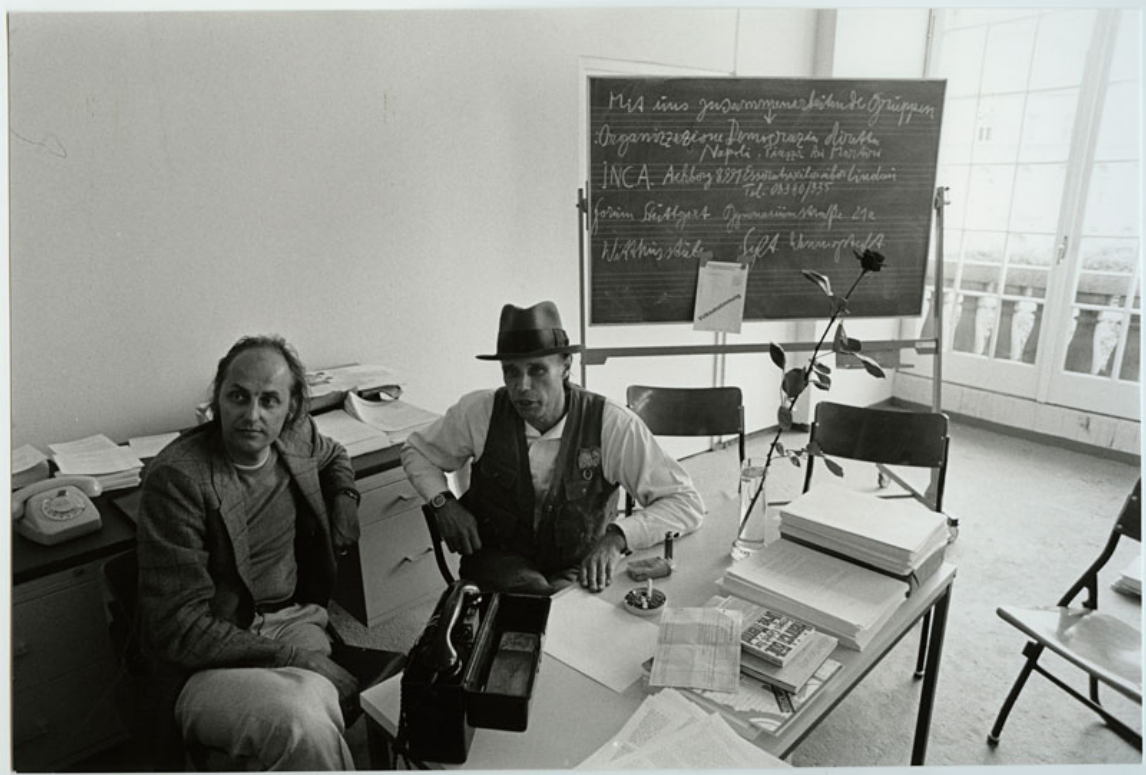


Figure 1.19. Joseph Beuys, Installation view of *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum), *documenta 5*, June 30 - October 8, 1972, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 1.20. Joseph Beuys, Installation view of *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum), *documenta 5*, June 30 - October 8, 1972, Kassel, Germany. Photographer: Balthasar Burkhard. © documenta Archives



Figure 1.21. Bruce Nauman, *My Last Name Exaggerated Fourteen Times Vertically*, 1967, included in *documenta 4*, 1968, Kassel, Germany. Photographer: Rudolph Burckhardt. © documenta Archives



Figure 1.22. Bruce Nauman, *The True Artist Helps the World by Revealing Mystic Truths* (Window or Wall Sign), 1967.

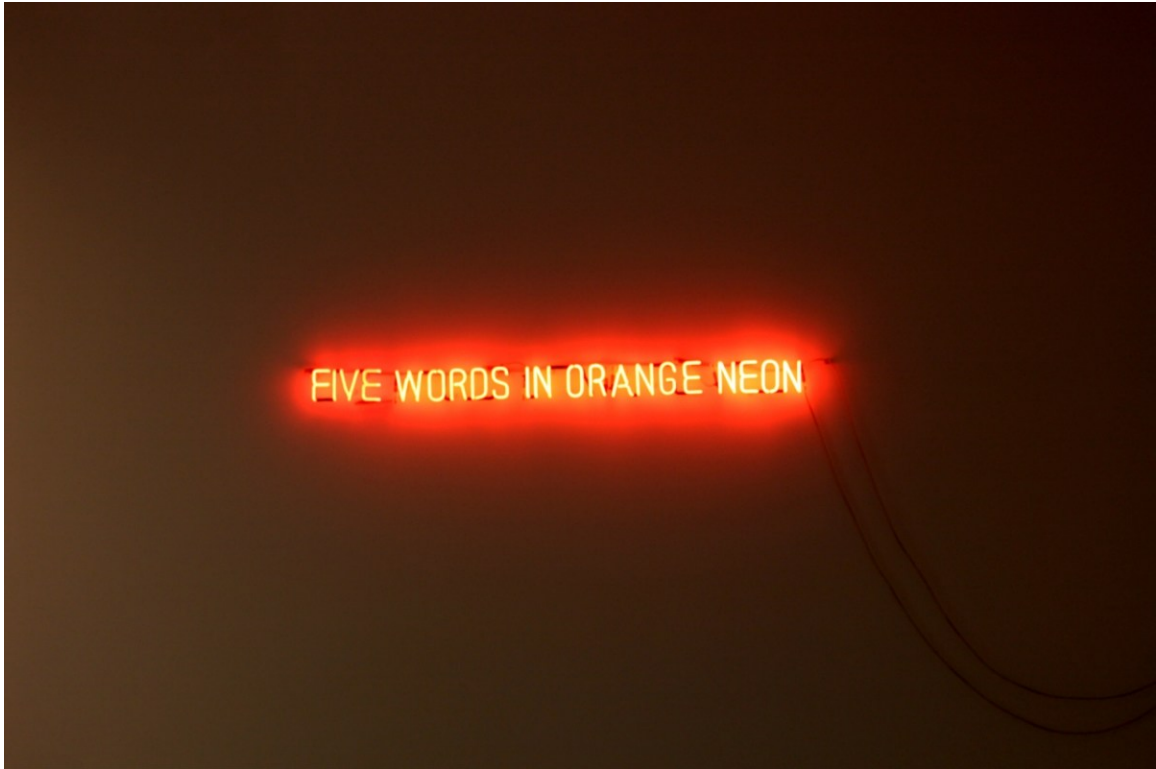


Figure 1.23. Joseph Kosuth, *Five Words in Orange Neon*, 1965.



Figure 1.24. Joseph Beuys, Installation view of *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum), *documenta 5*, June 30 - October 8, 1972, Kassel, Germany. Photographer: Erhard Wehrmann. © documenta Archives



Figure 1.25. Joseph Beuys, *Rose für direkte Demokratie* (Rose for Direct Democracy), 1973. Publisher: Edition Staack, Heidelberg. Edition unlimited, copies 1-440 signed and numbered on certificate with handwritten addition 'Rose' stamped; copies 441 and over with facsimile certificate.



Figure 1.26. Thomas Peiter painting the signs “Dürer, ich führe persönlich Baader + Meinhof durch die Dokumenta V,” 1972, *documenta 5*, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 1.27. Joseph Beuys (with Thomas Peiter), *Dürer, ich führe persönlich Baader + Meinhof durch die Dokumenta V* (Dürer, I will personally guide Baader + Meinhof through Documenta V), 1972.



Figure 1.28. Joseph Beuys, Installation view of *Büro der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung* (Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum), *documenta 5*, June 30 - October 8, 1972, Kassel, Germany.
© documenta Archives



Figure 1.29. Joseph Beuys, *Demokratie ist lustig* (Democracy is Merry), 1973. Publisher: Edition Staack, Heidelberg. Edition of 100, signed and numbered.



Figure 2.1. Joseph Beuys, KP Brehmer, KH Hödicke, Peter Hutchinson, Arthur Köpcke, Sigmar Polke, Wolf Vostell, *Weekend*, 1971-72. Publisher: Edition Block, Berlin. Edition of 95 (planned).



Figure 2.2. Joseph Beuys, *Ich kenne kein Weekend* (I Know No Weekend), 1971. Publisher: Edition Block, Berlin. Edition of 95 (planned).



Figure 2.3. Two versions of Joseph Beuys, *Ich kenne kein Weekend* (I Know No Weekend), 1971. Publisher: Edition Block, Berlin. Edition of 95 (planned).



Figure 2.4. History of Maggi liquid seasoning labels, available on the Maggi corporate website.



Figure 2.5. Various artists, *Fluxkit*, 1965. Publisher: George Maciunas, New York.



Figure 2.6. Eric Andersen, George Brecht, John Cale, John Cavanaugh, Willem de Ridder, Albert Fine, Ken Friedman, Fred Lieberman, George Maciunas, Yoko Ono, Ben Patterson, James Riddle, Paul Sharits, Bob Sheff, Stanley Vanderbeek, Ben Vautier, Robert Watts, *Flux Year Box 2*, 1967. Publisher: George Maciunas / Fluxshop, New York.



Figure 2.8. Marcel Duchamp, *Rotorelief*, originally 1935, re-issued 1953, 1959, and 1965. Publisher: Edition M.A.T. (1959 edition), Paris. Edition of 100.



Figure 2.9. Man Ray, *Objet indestructible* (Indestructible Object), originally 1923, remade 1933, published as a multiple 1965. Publisher: Edition M.A.T., Paris. Edition of 100.



Figure 2.10. Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, originally 1917, published as a multiple 1964. Publisher: Galeria Arturo Schwarz, Milan. Edition of 12.



Figure 2.11. Marcel Duchamp, *In Advance of the Broken Arm*, originally 1915, published as a multiple, 1964. Publisher: Galeria Arturo Schwarz, Milan. Edition of 12.



Figure 2.12. Marcel Duchamp, *Boite-en-valise* (Box in a Suitcase), 1935-41. Editions variable. Collection of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art.

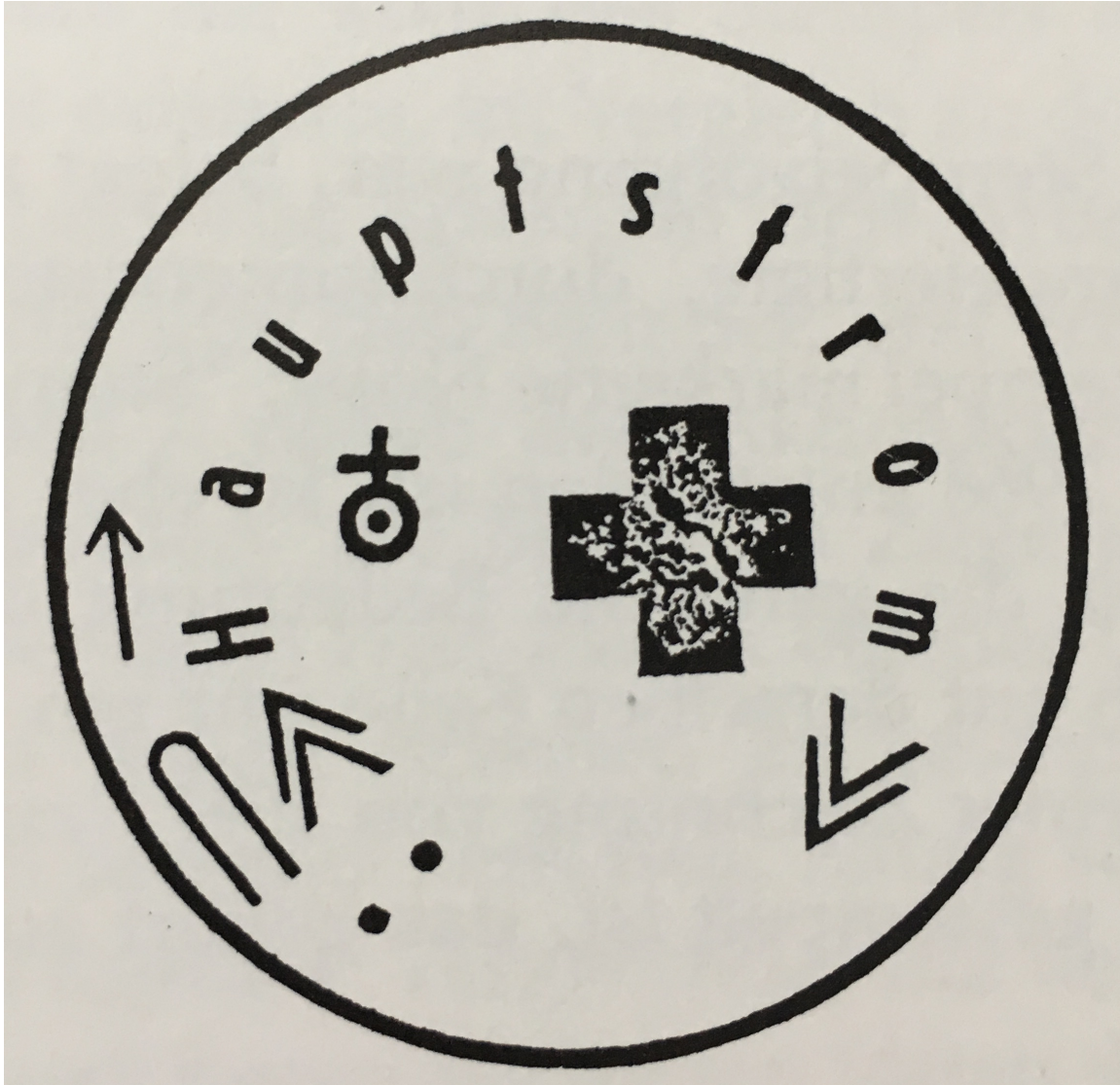


Figure 2.13. *Hauptstrom* (Main Stream) insignia, rubber stamp designed and fabricated in early 1950s. Reproduced in *Joseph Beuys: Zeichnungen, Skulpturen, Objekte*, p. 171.

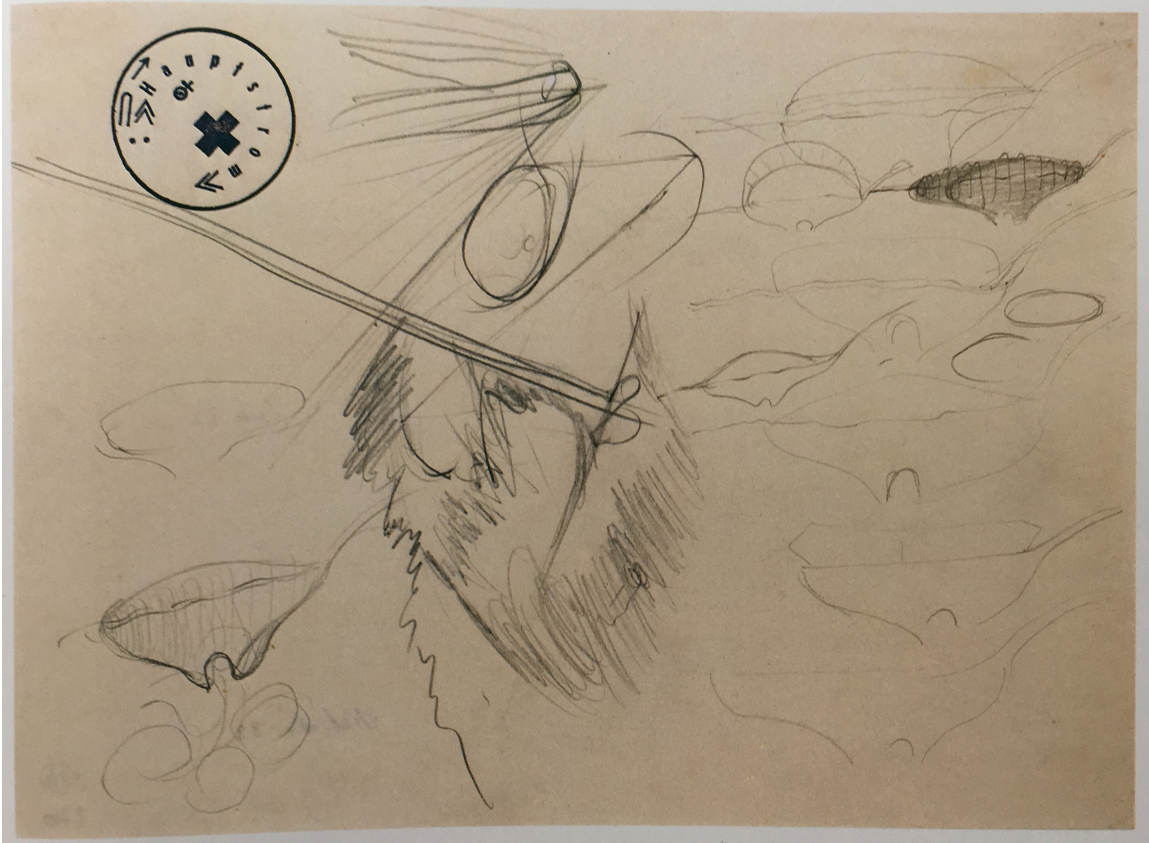


Figure 2.14. Joseph Beuys, *Aus dem Leben der Bienen* (From the Life of Bees), 1952.

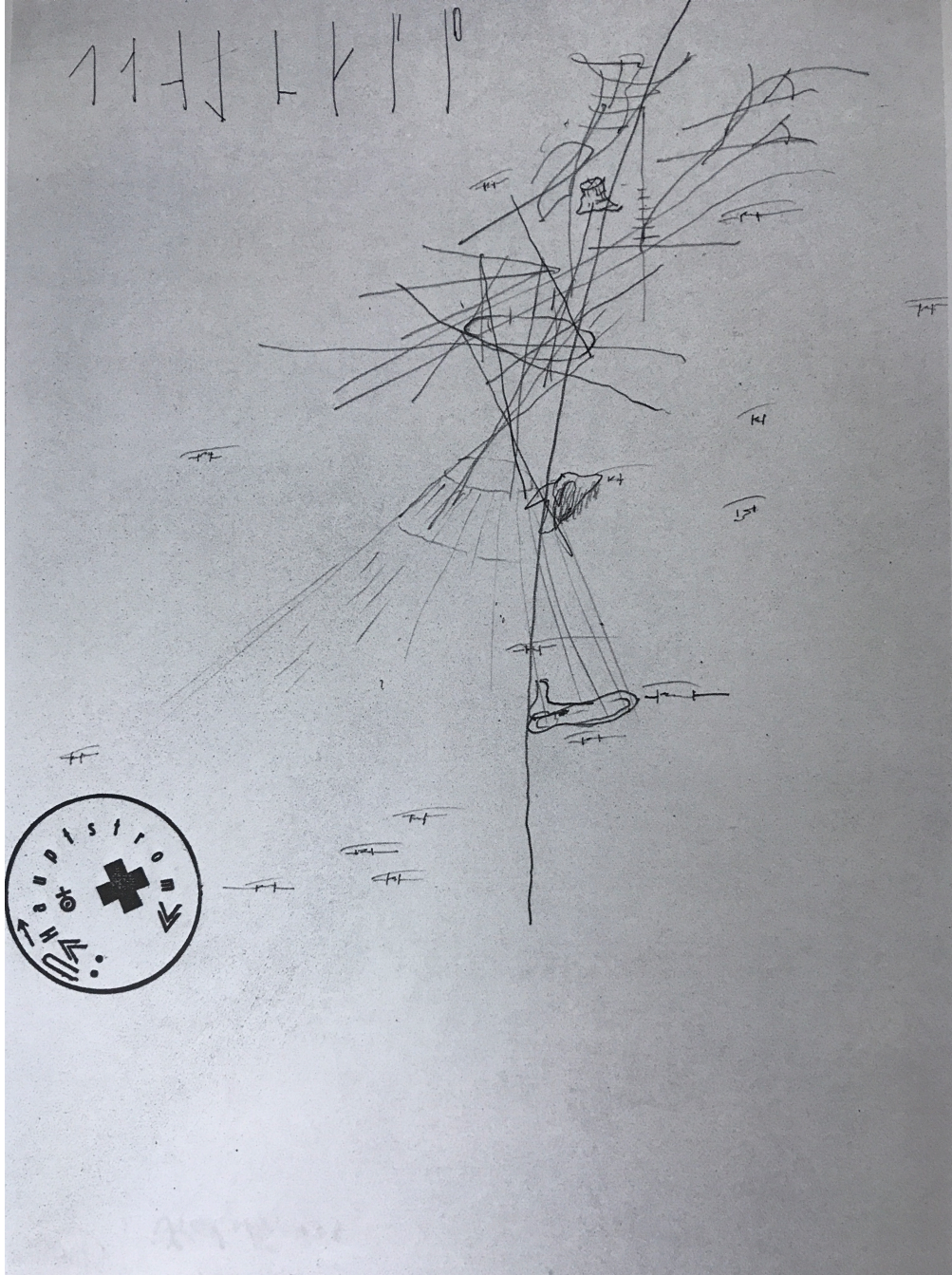


Figure 2.15. Joseph Beuys, *Partitur*, 1959.

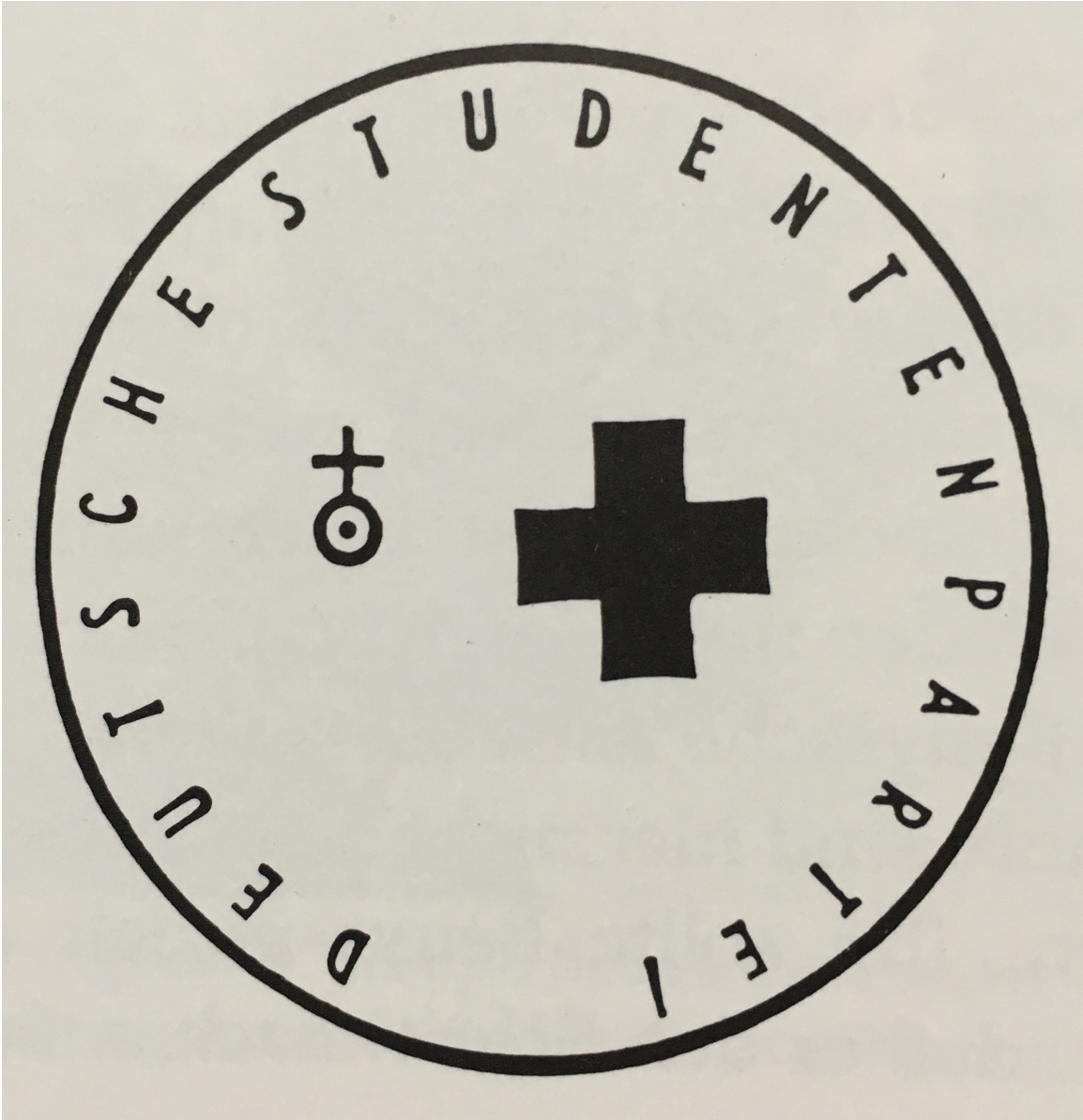
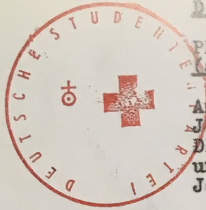


Figure 2.16. Joseph Beuys, Design for *Deutsche Studentenpartei* (German Student Party) insignia, 1967.



DEUTSCHE STUDENTENPARTEI

PROTOKOLL DER GRÜNDUNGSVERSAMMLUNG VOM 22. JUNI 1967
(angefertigt von Johannes Stüttgen)

An 22. Juni 1967, 16.00 Uhr, fand unter Vorsitz von Professor Joseph Beuys in Düsseldorf die Gründungsversammlung der DEUTSCHEN STUDENTENPARTEI statt. Außer den dieses Protokoll unterzeichnenden Mitglieder nahmen viele Studenten und Journalisten an der Versammlung teil.

Die Notwendigkeit der neuen Partei, deren wesentliches Anliegen die Erziehung aller Menschen zur geistigen Mündigkeit ist, wurde vor allem angesichts der akuten Bedrohung durch die am Materialismus orientierte, ideenlose Politik und der damit verbundenen Stagnation ausdrücklich herausgestellt. Dementsprechend mußten Fragen nach einem sich innerhalb des üblichen politischen Rahmens befindlichen Programm zurückgewiesen werden. Die Partei, die sich zum Grundgesetz in seiner reinen Form bekennt und grundsätzlich für die Menschenrechte eintritt, deren Voraussetzung sie in der uneingeschränkten Bereitschaft der Menschen zu der Verwirklichung ihrer Pflichten sieht, arbeitet für die notwendige Erweiterung des Bewußtseins mit geistigen, vernünftigen Methoden, also fortschrittlich für den Fortschritt, also menschlich, und betonte deshalb die Radikalität ihrer Forderungen nach grundlegender Erneuerung aller herkömmlichen Formen im Leben und Denken der Menschen. Echte Auseinandersetzung sei - so Beuys - nötig, aber nur auf geistiger, künstlerischer Ebene möglich. Nur im Kampf der Ideen vollzöge sich Demokratie und ernstes, menschliches Tun. Utilitaristische, bloß wirtschaftlich bestimmte Ziele haben ebenso wie jeglicher Egoismus überhaupt hinter den künstlerischen Forderungen des Augenblicks, somit der Geschichte, prinzipiell zurückzustehen und müßten letztlich völlig abgebaut werden. Nur die Spitze sei der Maßstab für menschenwürdiges Handeln. Dies sei das Interesse aller Menschen im eigentlichen Sinne, deren Anwaltschaft deshalb auch die DEUTSCHE STUDENTENPARTEI übernehmen wolle. Sie vertritt die Menschen - so verstanden - überall, also auch in der Politik, die sie dahingehend verändern möchte, und kann von allen gewählt werden. Jeder ist zur Mitarbeit aufgefordert.

Auf Fragen nach konkreten Zielen nannte Beuys u.a. absolute Waffenlosigkeit, ein geeinigtes Europa, die Selbstverwaltung autonomer Glieder wie Recht - Kultur - Wirtschaft, die Erarbeitung neuer Gesichtspunkte zur Erziehung, Lehre, Forschung, die Auflösung der Abhängigkeit von Ost und West, wies jedoch ausdrücklich immer wieder auf den allesumfassenden Zusammenhang hin, der im Prinzip klar ist, im einzelnen aber konkret erarbeitet werden muß, und ohne den alle genannten Ziele lediglich weitere Mißverständnisse wären. Folgerichtig sei das Programm selbst die unendliche, täglich getane und immer bevorstehende Arbeit der Partei. Diese Arbeit setze bei jedem an sich selbst und seinem engsten Kreis an. Die Partei fasse alle guten Kräfte wirksam zusammen.

Die fruchtbare Beteiligung vieler Anwesenden an dem Gespräch (mit allen sich daraus ergebenden positiven Konsequenzen) einerseits, die tiefe Verständnislosigkeit ebenso vieler gegenüber den Ausführungen der Parteivertreter andererseits während der Gründungsversammlung, bestätigten nachdrücklich die Notwendigkeit dieser Versammlung und die der Gründung der Partei.

Düsseldorf, den 15. November 1967

b.w.

Figure 2.17. Joseph Beuys, *Gründungsprotokoll der Deutschen Studentenpartei* (Minutes of the Establishment of the German Student Party), June 22, 1967, stamped November 15, 1967.



Figure 2.18. Dieter Roth, *Stempelkasten* (Rubber Stamp Box), 1968. Publisher: Hansjörg Mayer, Stuttgart. Edition of approx. 50.



Figure 2.19. Arman, *Accumulation*, 1973. Publisher: Edition Schellmann, Munich. Edition of 100.

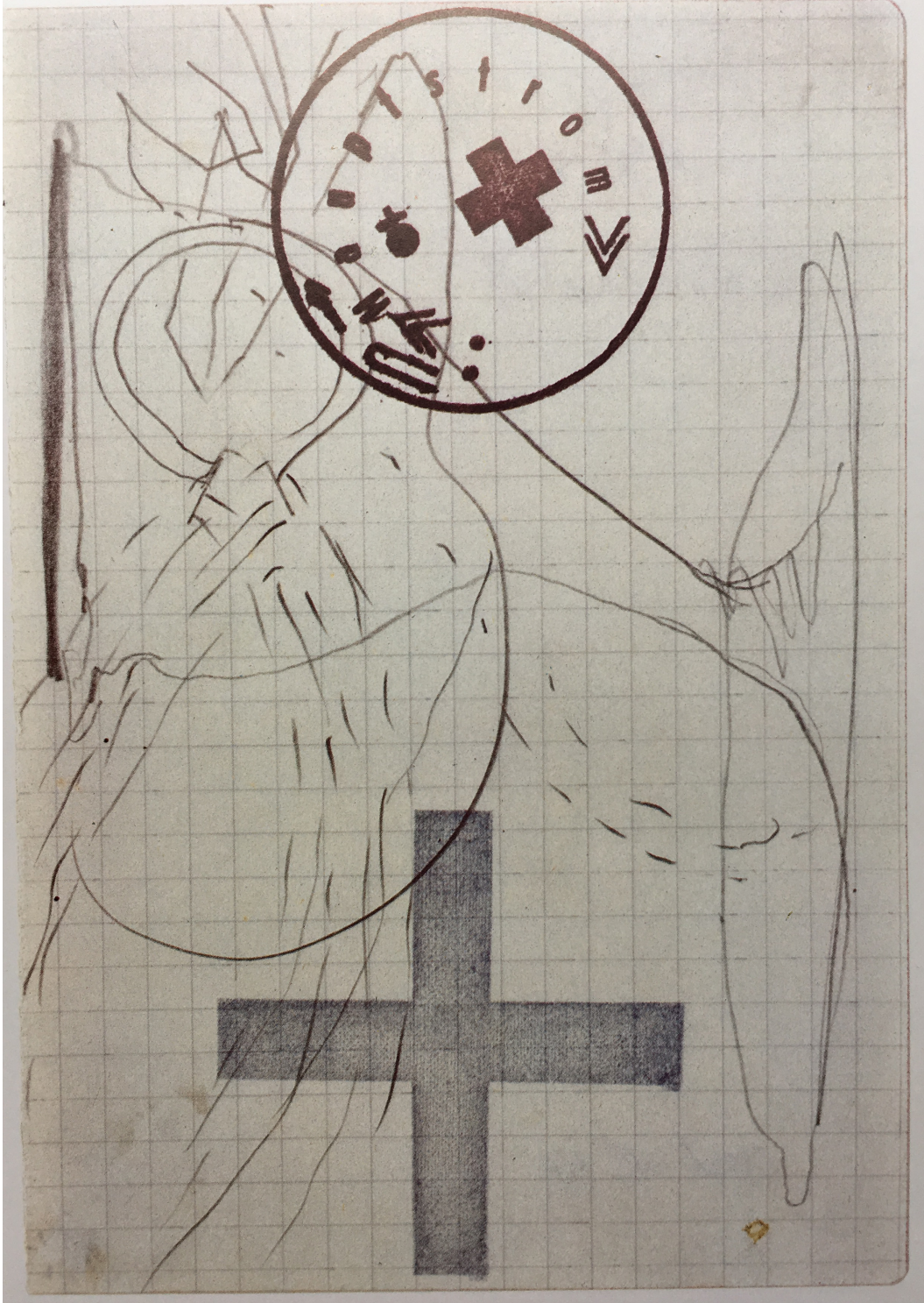


Figure 2.20. Joseph Beuys, *Nordlicht* (Northern Light), 1954.



Figure 2.21. Joseph Beuys, *Schlitten* (Sled), 1969. Publisher: Edition Block, Berlin. Edition of 50. Collection of the Pinakothek der Moderne, Munich.



Figure 2.22. Joseph Beuys, *Schlitten* (Sled), 1969. Publisher: Edition Block, Berlin. Edition of 50. Collection of the Broad Art Museum, Los Angeles.



Figure 2.23. Richard Serra, *Splash Piece*, 1969, in the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, 1969, Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland.



Figure 2.24. Joseph Beuys installing *Fettecke* (Fat Corner), 1969, in the exhibition *When Attitudes Become Form*, 1969, Kunsthalle Bern, Switzerland.



Figure 2.25. Three examples of Dieter Roth, *Taschenzimmer* (Pocket Room), released between 1968 and the late 1980s. Publisher: Vice-Versand. Edition: unlimited. From left to right: Collection of the Museum of Modern Art; Collection of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona; Collection of the Centre Pompidou.



Figure 2.26. Joseph Beuys, *Fettstuhl* (Fat Chair), 1963, permanently installed in a vitrine in the installation *Block Beuys*, Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Germany.

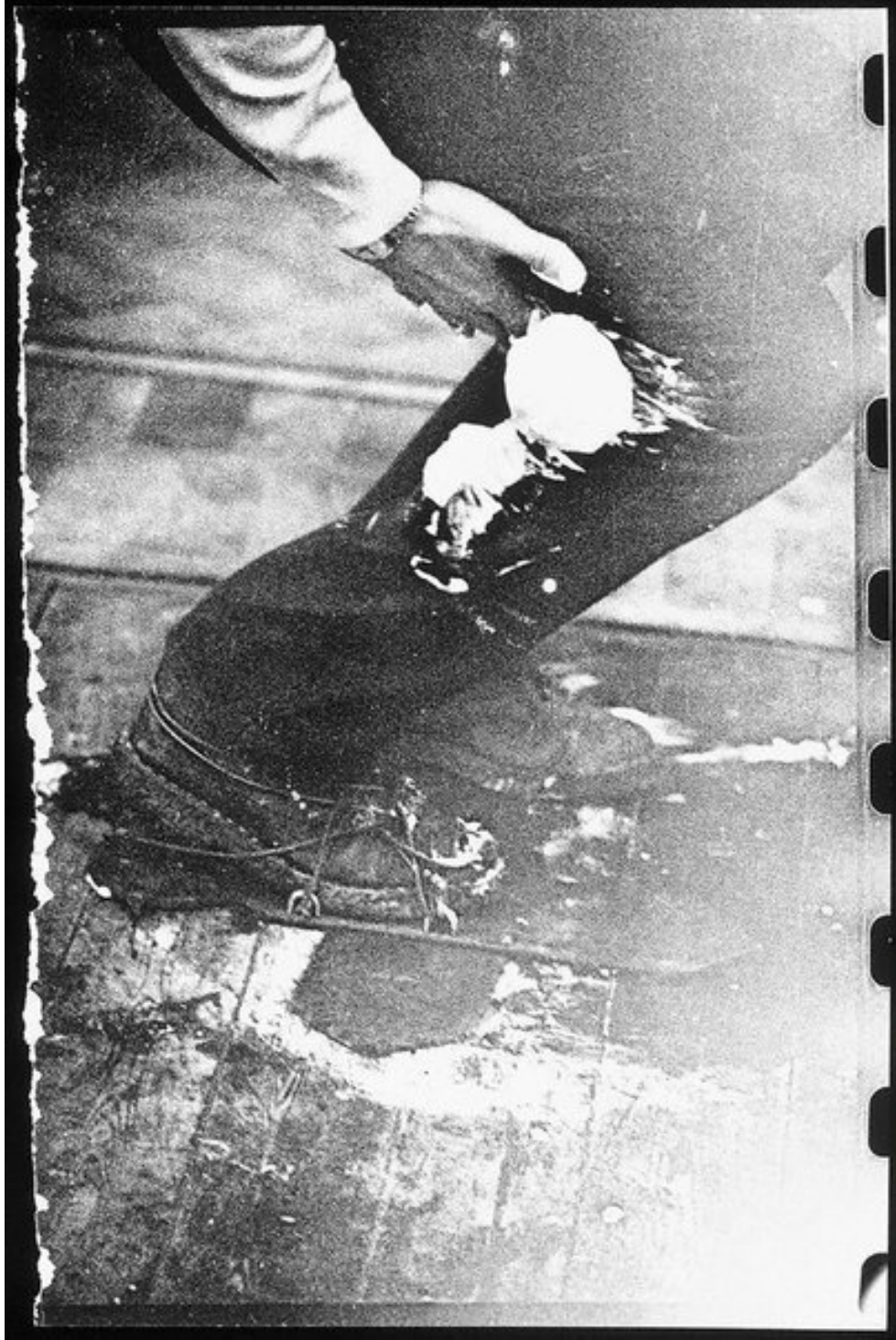


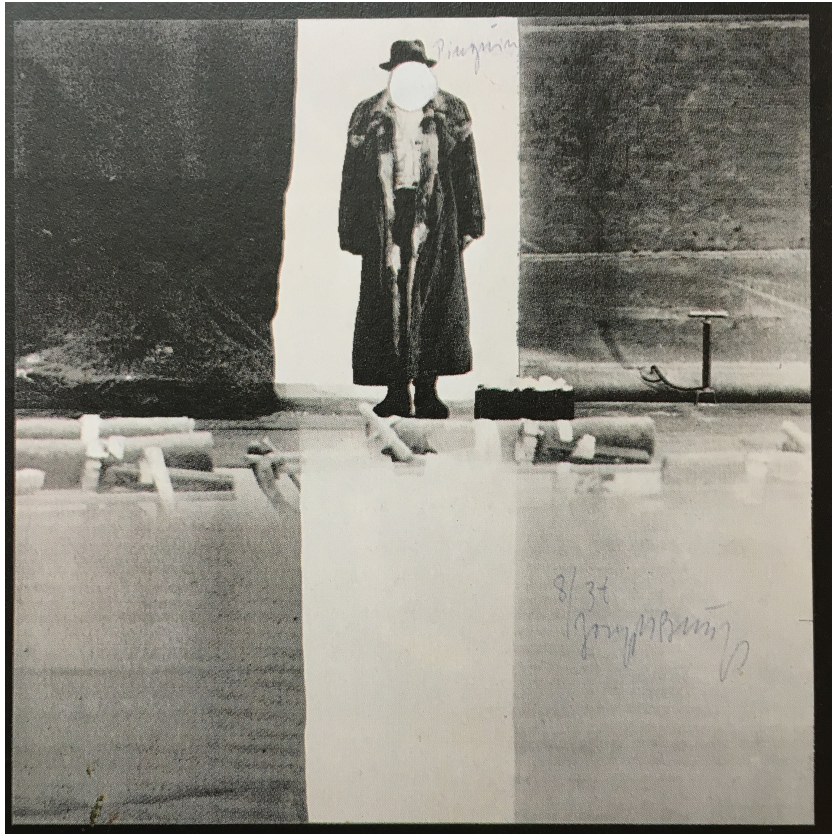
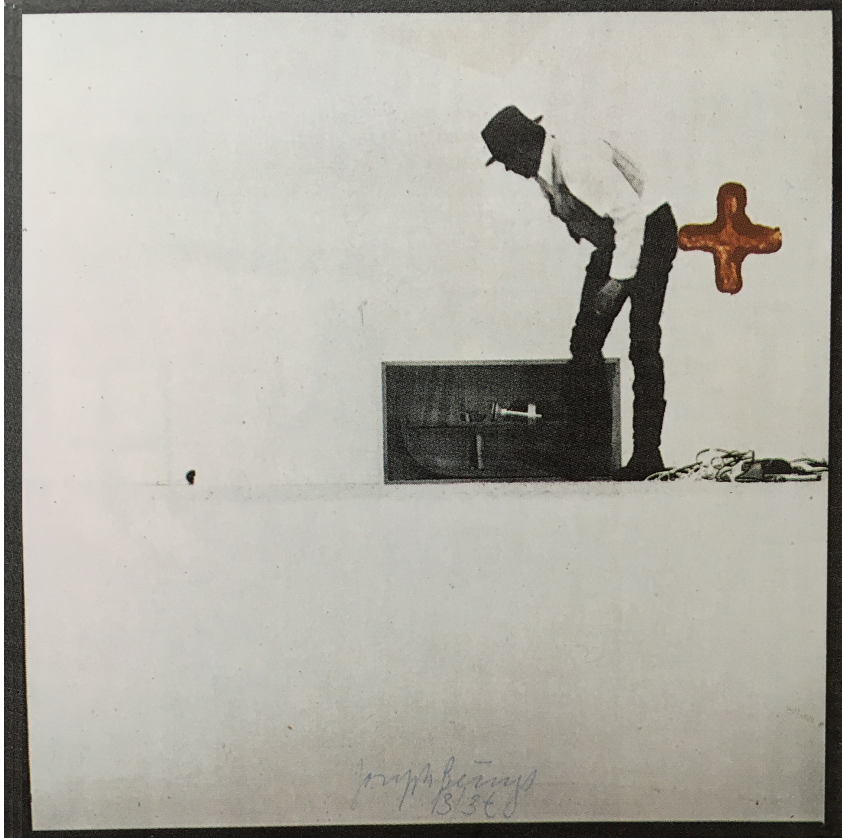
Figure 2.27. Joseph Beuys performing *Eurasianstab* (Eurasian Staff), 1967. Photographer: Ute Klophaus.



Figure 2.28. Installation view of Joseph Beuys, *Das Rudel* (The Pack), 1969, Kölner Kunstmarkt, Cologne, Germany.



Figure 2.29. Installation view of Joseph Beuys, *Die Meute* (The Mob), 1969, hallway of the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie, Germany. Photographer: Eva Beuys.



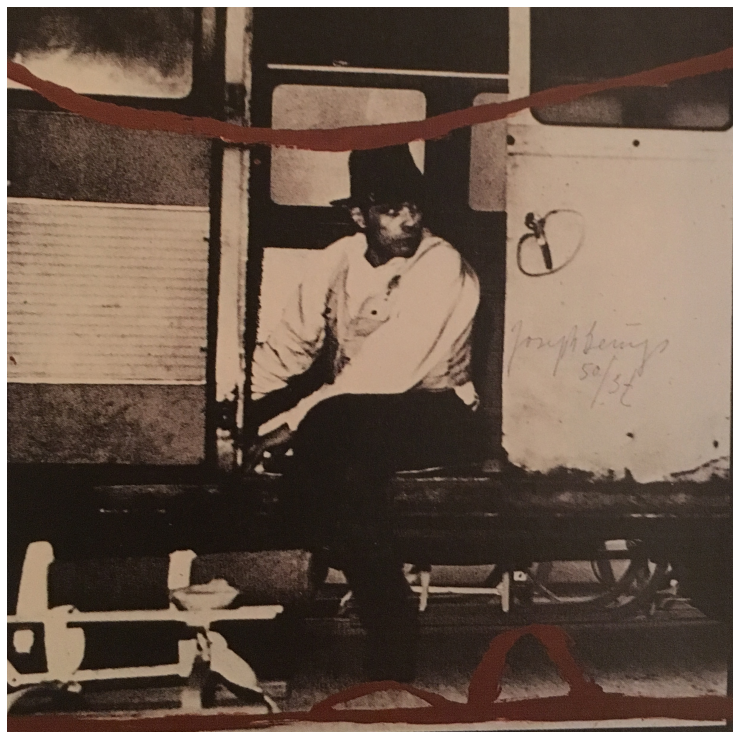


Figure 2.30. Joseph Beuys, Four plates from *3-Tonnen-Edition* (3 Ton Edition), 1973-85. Publisher: Edition Staeck, Heidelberg. Editions variable.



Figure 2.31. Joseph Beuys, *Unterwasserbuch* (Underwater Book), 1972.



Figure 2.32. Arnulf Rainer, Installation view of overpainted photographs, *documenta 5*, 1972, Kassel, Germany.

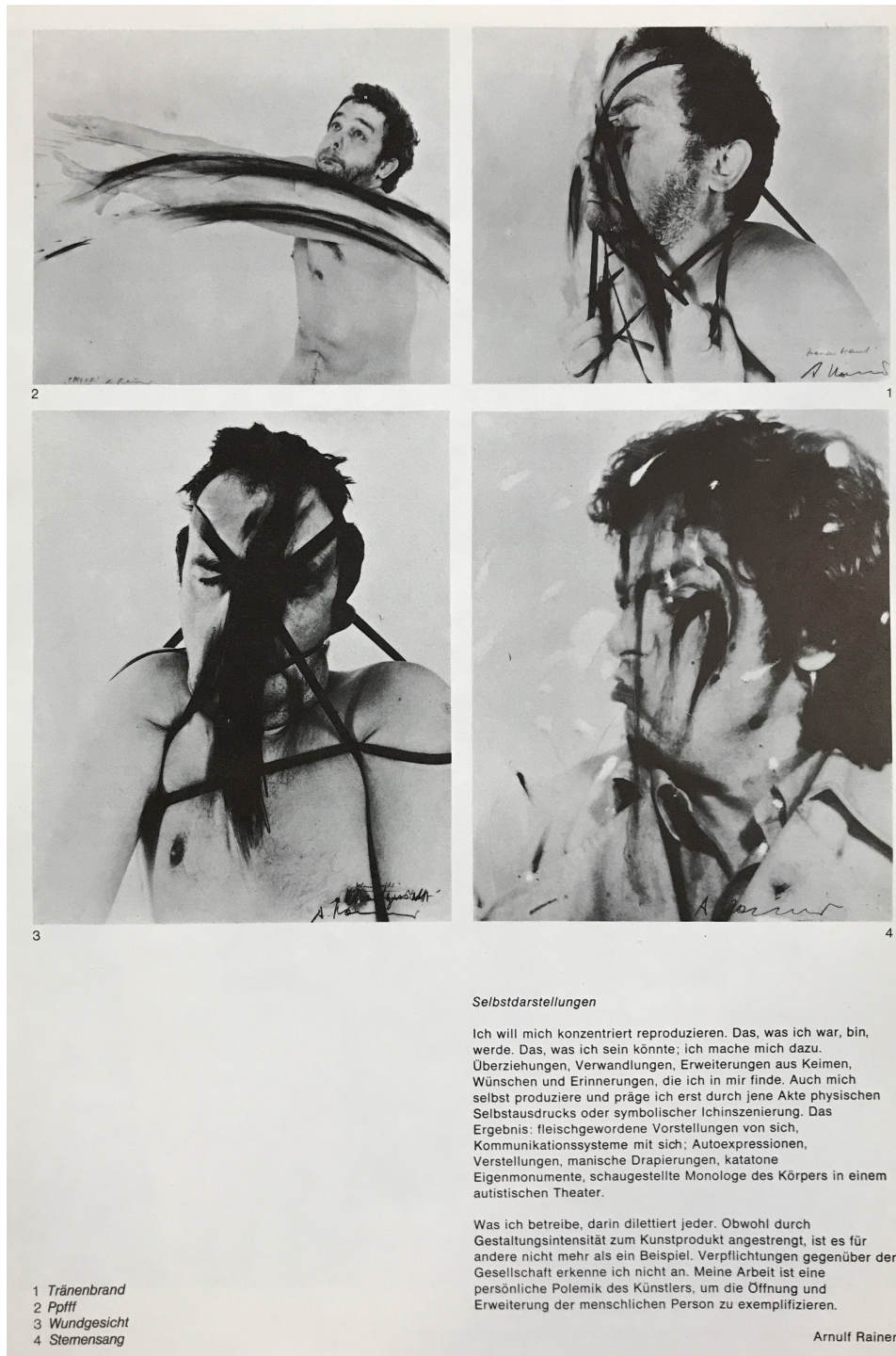


Figure 2.33. Selected works by Arnulf Rainer, c. 1971-72. Reproduced in the exhibition catalogue accompanying *documenta 5* (1972), p. 16-67.

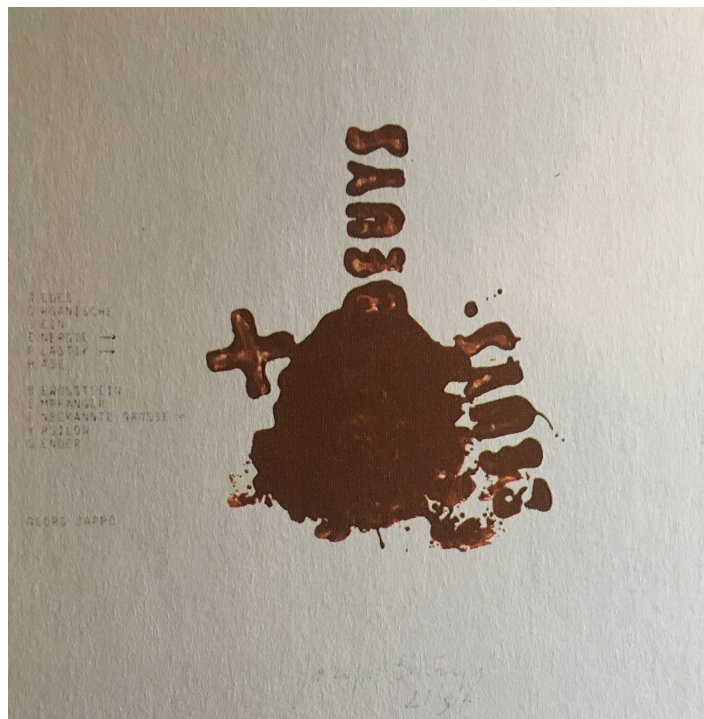


Figure 2.34. Joseph Beuys, Plates from *3-Tonnen-Edition* (3 Ton Edition), 1973-85. Publisher: Edition Staeck, Heidelberg. Editions variable.



Figure 2.35. Film still of Joseph Beuys performing *Fitz-TV* (Felt TV), 1970, broadcast on SWF/ARD, November 30, 1970, as part of Gerry Schum's "Fernsehausstellung" (Television Exhibition) *Identifications*.



Figure 2.36. Joseph Beuys, *Filz TV*, 1966. Publisher: Videogalerie Gerry Schum. Edition of 6.



Figure 2.37. Joseph Beuys, *Ja, ja, ja, ja, ja, nee, nee, nee, nee, nee*, 1969. Publisher: Gabriele Mazzotta Editore, Milan. Edition of 100 (plus 10 copies), numbered and unsigned.



Figure 2.38. Joseph Beuys, *Infiltration Homogen für Konzertflügel* (Homogeneous Infiltration for Piano), 1966.



Figure 2.39. Joseph Beuys and Henning Christiansen, *Grüne Geiger* (Green Violin), 1974. Publisher: Edition Schellmann & Kluser. Edition of 24.



Figure 2.40. Joseph Beuys, *Telefon S——E* (Telephone T——R), 1974. Publisher: Edition Schellmann & Kluser, Munich. Edition of 24 plus VI; plus a few unnumbered.



Figure 2.41. Joseph Beuys, *Das Schweigen (Silence)*, 1973. Publishers: Edition René Block, Berlin, and Multiples, New York. Edition of 50 plus 10 H.C.



Figure 2.42. Joseph Beuys, *Noiseless Blackboard Eraser*, 1974. Publisher: Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York. Edition of 550 plus 6 *hors d'commerce* (sales samples, hereafter H.C.), signed and numbered.



Figure 2.43. Joseph Beuys, *Stempelplastik* (Stamp Sculpture), 1982. Edition of 35 + 111 + 3 A.P.



Figure 3.1. Joseph Beuys planting the first oak of 7000 *Eichen* (7000 Oaks), March 16, 1982, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 3.2. Joseph Beuys planting the first oak of 7000 *Eichen* (7000 Oaks), March 16, 1982, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 3.3. Basalt steles piled on Friedrichsplatz, May 1982, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 3.4. View of Kassel, Germany, early 1945.

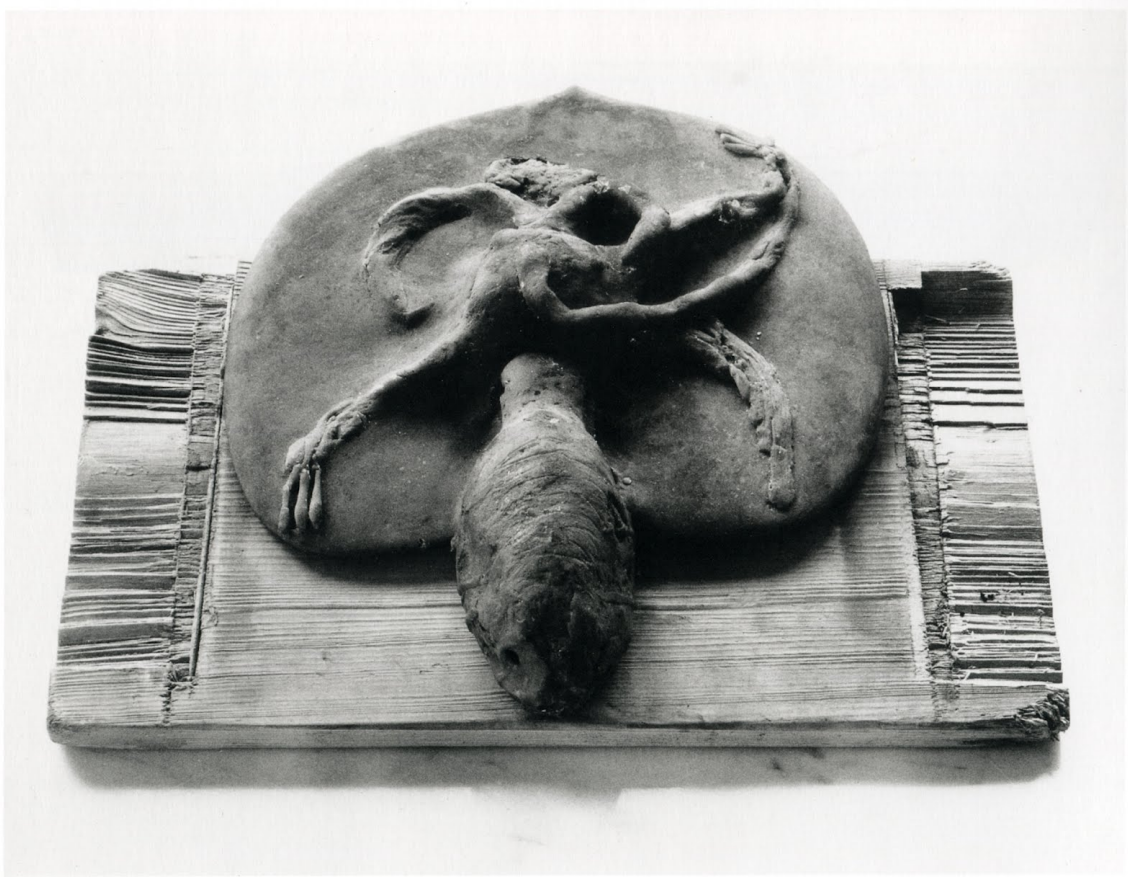


Figure 3.5. Joseph Beuys, *Bienenkönigin 3* (Queen Bee 3), 1952.



Figure 3.6. Joseph Beuys in his installation at the opening of *documenta 4*, 1968, Kassel, Germany. Photographer: Abisag Tüllmann.

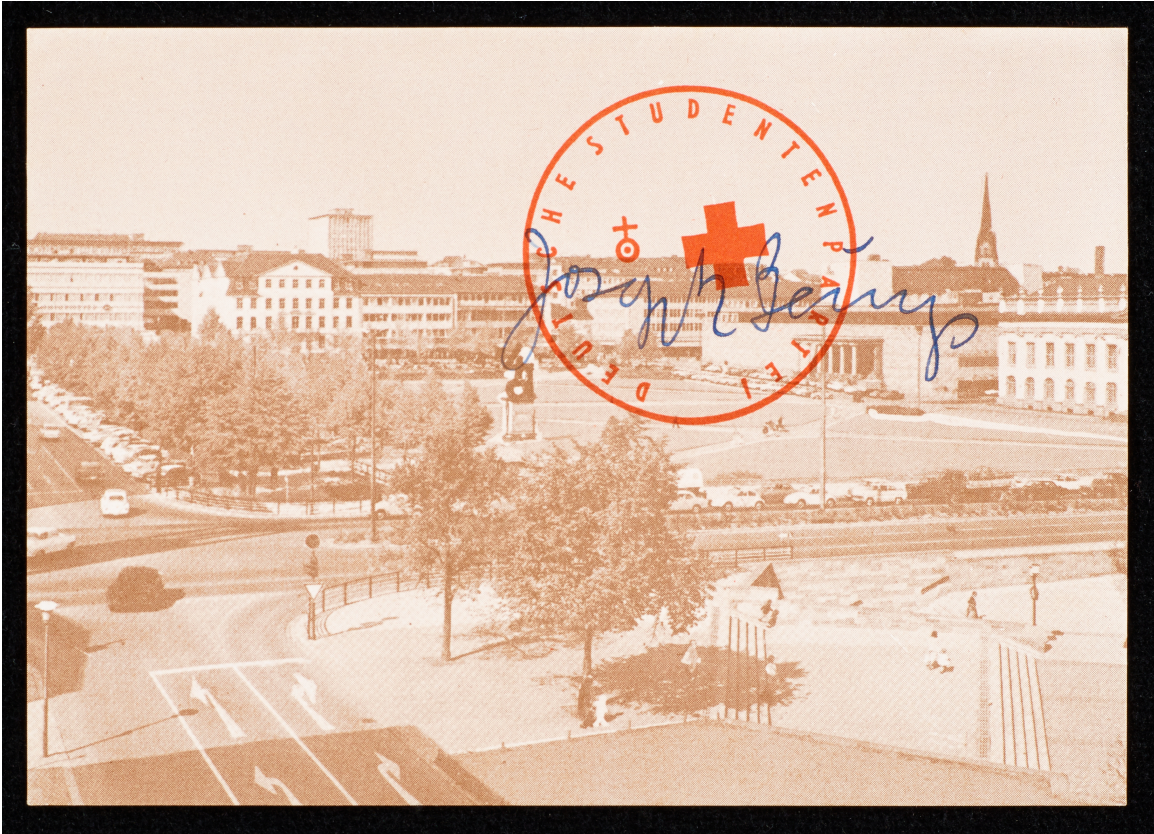


Figure 3.7. Joseph Beuys, Postcard of Kassel with Deutsche Studentenpartei stamp in red with signature, 1968. Publisher: Edition Tangente, Heidelberg. Edition: Unlimited, unsigned; many copies signed. Special edition: 30 copies signed and numbered 1-30; plus a small number of copies with triple stamp, signed, unnumbered.



Figure 3.8. Karl Friedrich Schinkel, *A Gothic Cathedral Behind Trees*, 1813-15.





Figures 3.9-12. Various insignias of the National Socialist (Nazi) Party and Third Reich depicting oak leaves or acorns, c. 1936-45.



Figure 3.13. Jesse Owens and U.S. Olympic teammates holding Owens's four oak saplings, Berlin, Germany, 1936.



Figure 3.14. Joseph Beuys, *Überwindet endlich die Parteiendiktatur* (Overcome Party Dictatorship Now), 1972.



Figure 3.15. Joseph Beuys, Installation view of *The End of the Twentieth Century*, 1983-85. Tate Modern, London.

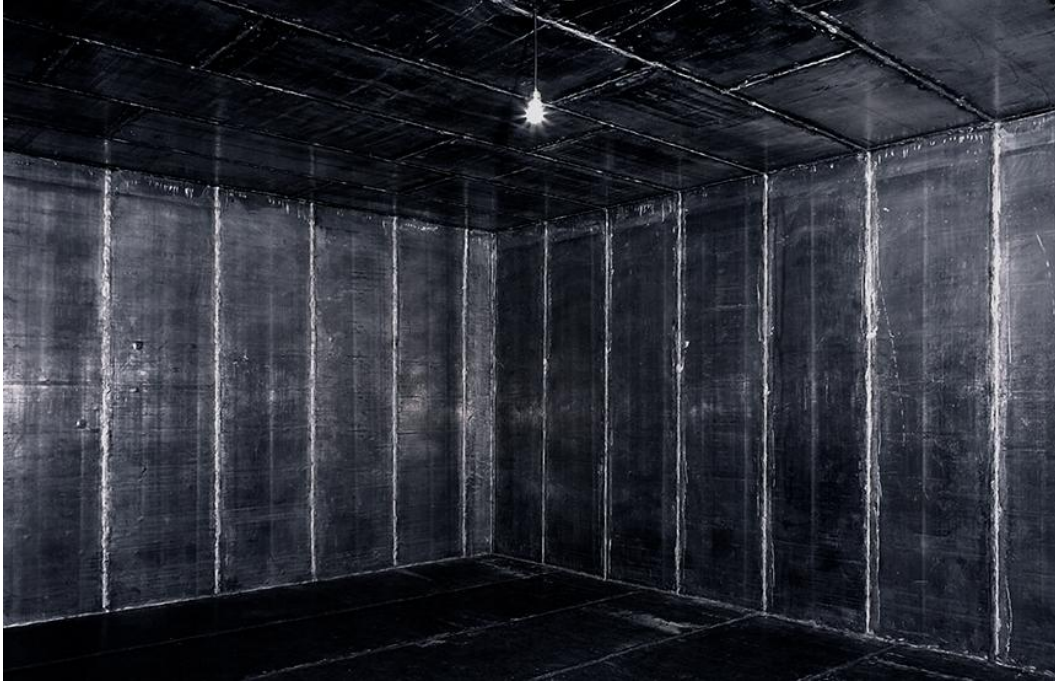


Figure 3.16. Joseph Beuys, Installation view of *Hinter dem Knochen wird gezählt – SCHMERZRAUM* (Behind the bone is counted – Pain Space), December 1983 - February 1984, Galerie Konrad Fischer, Düsseldorf, Germany.



Figures 3.17-18. Installation views of Giuseppe Penone, *Idee di Pietra* (Ideas of Stone), 2012 *documenta 13*, Kassel, Germany.



Figures 3.19-20. Installation view and detail of drawings by Korbinian Aigner, *documenta 13*, Kassel, Germany, 2012.



Figure 3.21. Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev and Jimmie Durham planting a Korbinian apple tree behind the Museum Fridericianum, *documenta 13*, Kassel Germany, 2012.



Figures 3.22-23. Maria Loboda, Installation views of *This work is dedicated to an emperor*, 2012, *documenta 13*, Kassel, Germany.



Figures 3.24-25. Pierre Huyghe, Installation view of *Untilled*, 2012, *documenta 13*, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 3.26. Mark Dion, *Xylotheque* (Wood Library), 2012, *documenta 13* project for the Ottoneum, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 3.27. Mark Dion, Detail from *Xylotheque* (Wood Library), 2012, *documenta 13* project for the Ottoneum, Kassel, Germany.



Figure 3.28. Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller, *Forest (for a thousand years...)*, 2012, *documenta 13*, Kassel, Germany.

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