

Joseph Beuys and Dirk Schwarze Report on a Day's Proceedings at the *Bureau for Direct Democracy*//1972

Joseph Beuys' concept of 'Social Sculpture' remains an important reference for contemporary artists such as Thomas Hirschhorn. The following report on Beuys' Bureau for Direct Democracy (1972), a 100-day live installation at Documenta 5, records in candid detail the type of relational encounters generated by his activist approach. It is followed by 'I am searching for field character' (1973), Beuys' most concise statement on Social Sculpture.

30 June to 8 October 1972: Joseph Beuys runs an office of information for the 'Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum' at Documenta 5.

Beuys' participation in the Documenta was instituted with the intention of representing and making known his expanding art concept through an office of information at this internationally respected and visited art forum. During the 100 days of the Documenta, Beuys was present daily at this information office and discussed with visitors the idea of direct democracy through referendum and its possibilities for realization.

Report of a day's proceedings in the office of Joseph Beuys, Fridericianum, written by Dirk Schwarze:

10:00 a.m. The Documenta opens; Beuys, in a red fishing vest and felt hat, is in his office. He has two co-workers. On the desk is a long-stemmed rose, next to it are piles of handbills. On the wall with the window is a blue neon sign that says 'Office of the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum'. Besides this, there are several blackboards on the walls. On each is written the word 'man'.

11:00 a.m. Until now about 80 visitors in the office. Half, however, remain standing in the doorway and look around, others walk past the blackboards and then remain longer in the office. Some only come to the door and leave in fright, as if they had come into the wrong restroom.

11:07 a.m. The room fills up. Beuys offers a young man material and initiates the first discussion. A young man asks about Beuys' goal and thinks that at a referendum 90 per cent would declare themselves in favour of the present system. Beuys explains the present party structure, which is ruled from top to bottom. He wants a system that is ruled from bottom to top. Still, if 60 per cent voted for the present system in a referendum, it would be a success because through it a new awareness could be created.

11:20 a.m. The discussion expands: five listeners. A man who says he is a member of a party takes part in the talk. Beuys explains his concept: 'We do not want to be a power factor, but an independent free school.' The goal would be to establish a whole network of offices as schooling places which would contribute to consciousness formation. One must start with the present possibilities. Referendum is provided for in the constitution of North Rhine-Westphalia. For a vote of the Federal Diet Beuys recommends a vote of abstinence, linked to a 'counter-demonstration', to make clear why one is not voting. The party member accepts the material: 'This is very interesting to me.'

11:45 a.m. Up to now 130 visitors. The discussion continues, with eight listeners. A young Swiss asks whether Beuys wants nationalization of industry. The answer: 'No, I have no use for nationalization, but I do want socialization.' The state, whether east or west, appears to him as evil. He quotes Bishop Dibelius, who describes the state as 'the animal from underground'.

12:20 a.m. Up to now 210 visitors. A vigorous argument begins between Beuys and a young man who designates himself a member of the German Communist Party. Sixteen listeners. The young man calls Beuys' activities 'nonsense', a waste of energy. 'What have you accomplished?' he asks, and invites Beuys to join the workers' movement rather than to lead an organization that is financed by industrialists. Beuys replies: 'You cannot think straight. I cannot work with the concept of class. What is important is the concept of man. One must straightforwardly realize what has not yet appeared in history, namely, democracy.'

12:35 a.m. In the meantime 22 listeners. An elderly man joins in: 'Can we talk about the Documenta here and not just about politics?' Beuys: 'Politics and the creativity of all are dealt with here.' When the man speaks of the failure of the exhibition because no one here is directly interested, Beuys asserts, 'It is also a failure on the part of the visitors, because they are not more capable of giving of themselves.'

1:00 p.m. Until now 360 visitors. The vigorous talk with the Communist Party member continues, 22 listeners. Beuys energetically defends himself against the reproach that he indulges in a utopia, replying: 'I am against a revolution in which one drop of blood flows.' Marxists, he says, are, for him, devout fetishists in this connection.

1:05 p.m. A young woman: 'Mr Beuys, your artworks are an ingredient in the system - they can be bought.' Beuys: 'Everyone who lives in the system participates in it. I make use of it through the sale of my work.'

1:30 p.m. Until now 450 visitors. At present thirty listeners. A middle-aged man addresses Beuys regarding the possibilities of change through art. Beuys wards it off: 'Art is not there to overthrow the state. According to my concept of

art, I want to affect all areas of life. What I practice here is my concept of art.' He admits, 'I believe in man.'

2:00 p.m. Until now 535 visitors. After the distribution of materials a quiet period sets in. Beuys fortifies himself: coffee and yogurt. He explains his models to a young girl: Rudolph Steiner, Schiller, and Jean Paul.

2:30 p.m. A young man: 'I don't see the connection between your theories and your felt objects.' Beuys: 'Many have seen only my objects, but not my concepts, which belong to them.'

3:00 p.m. Until now 560 visitors. A young girl comes to Beuys and asks: 'Is this art?' Answer: 'A special type of art. One can think with it, think with it.'

4:05 p.m. Until now 625 visitors. Two Italians want to know whether Beuys could be called a non-violent anarchist. Beuys says 'yes.'

4:15 p.m. The office fills up again. A teacher asks: 'Whom do you represent? Democracy, what does that mean? What models do you have?' Beuys: 'I have no historical model apart from reality and want to better these realities for the well-being of all.' An argument starts over whether direct or only representative government is possible.

4:30 p.m. Until now 670 visitors. At present twenty listeners. An elderly man: 'One is entertained too little here, there is so much at the Documenta that is boring. Documenta is still too elite.' Beuys: 'Art is experiencing a crisis. All fields are in a state of crisis.'

4:40 p.m. A young man: 'You are a big earner on the German art market. What do you do with the money?' Beuys: 'The money goes into this organization.'

4:45 p.m. Eighteen listeners. Beuys suggests to a teacher that he resign his civil service status; a lively discussion begins. The teacher argues that only Beuys could accomplish such a thing, because he is a famous artist. The teacher: 'My situation is fairly bad. It's easy for you to stand there with your moral declarations.'

5:15 p.m. Until now 720 visitors. After a discussion of the role of the art market as a middle market, another quiet period. The sale of the bags with the schematic representation of 'direct democracy' is flourishing. For the first time today a visitor asks for Beuys' autograph on the bag.

6:00 p.m. Visitors slacken noticeably. Until now about 780 visitors.

7:40 p.m. A total of 811 visitors, of which 35 asked questions or discussed.

8:00 p.m. Beuys' office closes.

Question To what extent do you believe an exhibition can be the most suitable forum for passing on to the public the impulses which you hope to attain?

Beuys The place is relatively unimportant. I have thought this over for a long

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time. For example, I have the office here; it is a copy of my office in Düsseldorf, which gives onto the street. This is so that people can come in right off the street. It looks exactly like our office, exactly. And there anyone can come in. I have thought about which is more effective: if I remain in Düsseldorf or if I climb onto this platform and reach men here. I came very simply to the conclusion that it is vacation time now in Düsseldorf; there we would have perhaps one visitor a day, and here we can reach more people. Here I can reach people from all over the world. Here I can establish international contacts. This is very important.

Question Do you see yourself as an individualist and do you see your office here as an isolated department?

Beuys No, in no way. I do not see myself as being isolated here. I have all kinds of possibilities here. I can speak freely with everyone. No one has prevented me yet. Whether someone will try to in the future, that we will find out. (Laughing) Yes, that we will find out, won't we?

Question You have set up your office here at the fifth Documenta, and with it you pursue not only political intentions but also artistic ones ...

Beuys Because real future political intentions must be artistic. This means that they must originate from human creativity, from the individual freedom of man. For this reason here I deal mostly with the problem of education, with the pedagogical aspect. This is a model of freedom, a revolutionary model of freedom. It begins with human thought and with the education of man in this area of freedom. And there must also be free press, free television, and so on, independent of state influence. Just as there must be an educational system independent of state influence. From this I attempt to develop a revolutionary model which formulates the basic democratic order as people would like it, according to the will of the people, for we want a democracy. It is part of the fundamental law: all state power comes from the people.

The area of freedom – not a free area – I want to emphasize this, because they are always being interchanged; people say Beuys wants a free area. I do not want a free area, an extra area, but I want an area of freedom that will become known as the place where revolution originates, changed by stepping through the basic democratic structure and then restructuring the economy in such a way that it would serve the needs of man and not merely the needs of a minority for their own profit. That is the connection. And that I understand as art.

Joseph Beuys/Dirk Schwarze, report on a day's proceedings at the *Informationsbüros der Organisation für direkte Demokratie durch Volksabstimmung*, Documenta 5 (Kassel, 1972); translated in Adriani Götz, et al., *Joseph Beuys: Life and Work* (New York: Barron's, 1979) 244–9.

Joseph Beuys

I Am Searching for Field Character//1973

Only on condition of a radical widening of definition will it be possible for art and activities related to art to provide evidence that art is now the only evolutionary-revolutionary power. Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system that continues to totter along the deathline: to dismantle in order to build A SOCIAL ORGANISM AS A WORK OF ART.

This most modern art discipline – Social Sculpture/Social Architecture – will only reach fruition when every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor or architect of the social organism. Only then would the insistence on participation of the action art of Fluxus and Happening be fulfilled; only then would democracy be fully realized. Only a conception of art revolutionized to this degree can turn into a politically productive force, coursing through each person and shaping history.

But all this, and much that is as yet unexplored, has first to form part of our consciousness: insight is needed into objective connections. We must probe (theory of knowledge) the moment of origin of free individual productive potency (creativity). We then reach the threshold where the human being experiences himself primarily as a spiritual being, where his supreme achievements (work of art), his active thinking, his active feeling, his active will, and their higher forms, can be apprehended as sculptural generative means, corresponding to the exploded concepts of sculpture divided into its elements – indefinite – movement – definite (see theory of sculpture), and are then recognized as flowing in the direction that is shaping the content of the world right through into the future.

This is the concept of art that carries within itself not only the revolutionizing of the historic bourgeois concept of knowledge (materialism, positivism), but also of religious activity.

EVERY HUMAN BEING IS AN ARTIST who – from his state of freedom – the position of freedom that he experiences at first hand – learns to determine the other positions in the TOTAL ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER. Self-determination and participation in the cultural sphere (freedom); in the structuring of laws (democracy); and in the sphere of economics (socialism). Self-administration and decentralization (threefold structure) occurs: FREE DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM.

THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL is born

Communication occurs in reciprocity: it must never be a one-way flow from the teacher to the taught. The teacher takes equally from the taught. So oscillates – at all times and everywhere, in any conceivable internal and external circumstance, between all degrees of ability, in the work place, institutions, the street, work circles, research groups, schools – the master/pupil, transmitter/receiver, relationship. The ways of achieving this are manifold, corresponding to the varying gifts of individuals and groups. THE ORGANIZATION FOR DIRECT DEMOCRACY THROUGH REFERENDUM is one such group. It seeks to launch many similar work groups or information centres, and strives towards worldwide cooperation.

Joseph Beuys, 'I am Searching for Field Character' (1973), in Carin Kuoni, ed., *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990) 21–3.

Collective Actions

Ten Appearances//1981

The five-person Collective Actions group, working in Moscow from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s, represent a particularly poetic and cerebral approach to participation. Ten Appearances is typical of their work in taking place in fields outside the city, with a small number of participants who took an active part in the action and then contributed to its analysis. These gestures differ from Western equivalents of this period in being preoccupied with art's internal reception and circulation, rather than in its relationship to social institutions.

In the middle of a large, snowed-over field surrounded by a forest, together with the action's organizers strode ten participants, knowing neither the name of that in which they were about to participate, nor what was to happen.

Ten spools on vertical nails were affixed to a board (60 x 90 cm) which was laid upon the snow. Each of the spools was wound with two to three hundred metres of strong, white thread. Each of the participants was required to take the end of a thread from one of the spools and, unravelling the thread from the spool, move in a straight line into the forest surrounding the field. Thus the ten participants were to have dispersed from the centre of the field in the following directions:



The participants were instructed to move in a straight line as far as the forest and then, entering the forest, to continue on into the depths of the forest for about another fifty to one hundred metres, or to the point where the field could no

longer be seen. Each of the participants travelled three to four hundred metres. Walking in the field and forest entailed a considerable physical effort, as the snow ranged from half a metre to a metre in depth. Having completed his trek, each participant (also according to prior instructions) was to pull to himself the other end of the thread (which was not attached to the spool), to which a piece of paper with factographic text (the last names of the organizers, time and place of the action) was affixed.

In so far as no further instructions had been given, each participant, having extracted his factography, was left to his own discretion as to further action; they could return to the field's centre, where the organizers remained, or, not returning, leave this place behind, moving on further through the forest.

Eight participants came back to the centre of the field within an hour; moreover, seven of them returned along their own paths, and one (N. Kozlov) along a neighbour's path. Two participants – V. Nekrasov and A. Zhigalov – did not return.

The returning participants received photographs (30 x 40 cm), glued to cardboard, from the organizers. Each photograph depicted the portion of the forest into which the participant receiving that photo had walked at the beginning of the action, and the scarcely distinguishable figure of a man emerging from the forest. The photographs were outfitted with label/signatures upon which were written the last names of the action's authors, the action's name *Ten Appearances*, and the event 'represented' in the photograph; for example, 'The appearance of I. Chuikov on the first of February, 1981', and so on. These photographs were taken within the week before the action: the action's organizers photographed in a 'zone of indifferentiation' in the very same directions in which the participants had been directed and from whence they had returned.

Thus the name of the action and its full significance became clear to the participants only at the moment when they received the photographs, and not when they pulled the factographic documents, which signified only the completion of the first stage of the action – the distancing of the participants into portions of the forest visually isolated one from another (at the terminal points of their paths out from the centre of the field, in the depths of the forest, the participants could not see each other, as the interstices between these points measured no less than four hundred metres). During the action, photographs were taken of the actual appearances from the forest. These photographs could be distinguished from those handed to the participants at the conclusion of the action by the differing conditions of the forest (snow which had covered the branches of the trees a week before the action had melted away), and by the absence of the quotation marks, which on the first photographs had been placed

around the names of the events depicted on them, i.e., in the given circumstances the simple appearance of I. Chuikov, I. Kabakov, I. Pivovarova and so on. The figures of the participants emerging from the forest were practically indistinguishable from the figures in the first 'metaphorical' photographs, owing to the fact that they were taken from equal distances (in the 'zone of indifferentiation'). The function of these 'metaphorical' photographs was, in the case of the participants' return, to indicate only the fact of their return (which was utterly volitional, as no instruction to return had been given), without adding any supplementary meaning to their prior acts of walking off and dispersing into the depths of the forest. At the same time these 'metaphorical' photographs were signs of time extrademonstrational (for the participants) to the event and were included in the structure of the action and served as its 'empty act'. In other words, they were signs of the time between the 'end' of the action and the moment when they were handed the photographs indicating their appearance (or return) from the forest, which the participants did not recognize and could not have recognized as the signified and culminating event in the structure of the action.

The fact that of the ten possible appearances only eight, and not all ten, came to pass, represents in our view not a failing of the action but, on the contrary, underscores the realization of zones of psychic experience of the action as aesthetically sufficient on the plane of the demonstrational field of the action as a whole. This is to say that the planned appearance in reality turned out to lie entirely in the extrademonstrational time of the event – the participant appeared from a non-artistic, non-artificially-constructed space.

Collective Actions (Andrei Monastyrsky, Georgii Kizevalter, Sergei Romashko, Nikita Alekseev, Igor Makarevich, Elena Elagina, Nikolai Panitkov), *Ten Appearances* ('Kievi-Gorky', Savel, Moscow Province, February 1981); translated in David A. Ross, et al., eds, *Between Spring and Summer – Soviet Conceptual Art in the Era of Late Communism* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art/Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1990) 157–8.