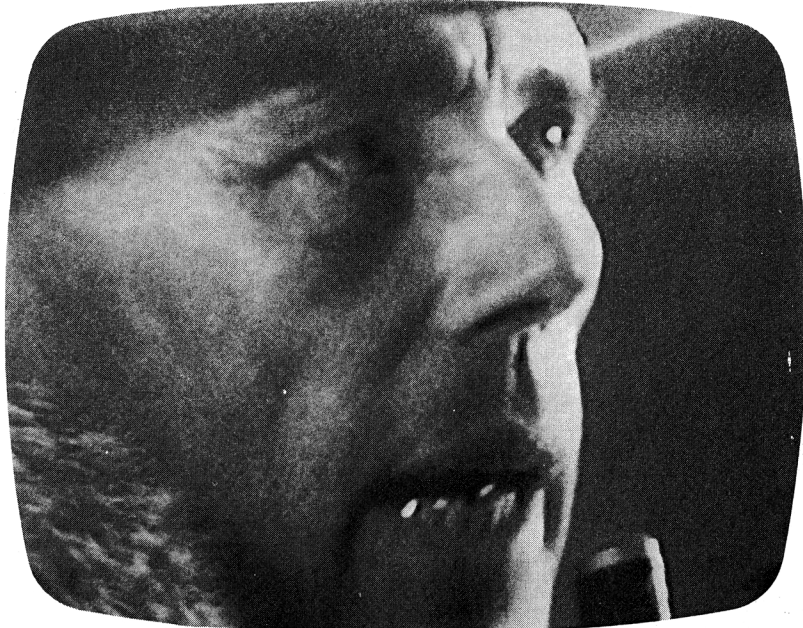


JOSEPH BEUYS



Beuys made his first visit to the United States from January 9 through January 19 this year at the invitation of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc. and Dayton's Gallery 12. He spent five days in New York and on January 11th at 8pm conducted a Public Dialogue at the New School to a packed auditorium of 350 people. Several hundred more people were crowded outside the doors and trying to get in. The following is a near-verbatim transcript of the first hour of the dialogue, which lasted for nearly three hours. Andy Mann shot a videotape of the whole thing which was shown at 112 Greene Street on Sunday, January 12, as Beuys' participation in Videoperformance.

Beuys: I would be very glad if there were a possibility, later, to speak to the public outside . . .

I was invited to come here to speak about my idea of art, which is to enlarge the effectivity of art beyond the idea of art as coming out of art history—an art idea which contains the well-known disciplines like sculpture, architecture, painting, music, dancing, poetry and so on. I would like to declare why I feel that it's now necessary to establish a new kind of art, able to show the problems of the whole society, of every living being—and how this new discipline—which I call social sculpture—can realize the future of humankind. It could be a guarantee for the evolution of the earth as a planet, establish conditions for other planetarians too, and you can control it with your own thinking . . . But first, before we begin with the discussion and the dialogue—and it would be very nice if the dialogue could be very intensive—let me show in general the structure of this thinking. In trying to change from one well-known ideology to another, you

capitalistic systems, this is not guaranteed. So research into a new political structure has to go on at the same time. But the term politics, in the light of what I have just said, has another content. It means now a kind of art. And therefore, in short, I'm saying, all work that's done has to have the quality of art. We can see later about developing a proof for this by thinking about these problems. Here is a general structure to show what I mean by a social sculpture.

(Beuys goes to blackboard and points out symbols for archetypal elements, plants, animals, minerals, soul which he had drawn before the discussion started.)

There is now already a question in the audience, and perhaps it would be good to begin with this question.

First questioner: Have you ever thought of using holography as a medium? *(Audience giggles.)*

Beuys: I have heard of this word "holography",

this, that it is not right, as nowadays practised, that politicians and managers of economic powers control the destinies of the majority. We can later return to these terms and make proofs in thinking to see if I am right in saying this. Now you are perhaps clear *(general laughter, good-humored)* or better able to speak about the idea of holography. When I hear this word, I feel a good thing, ya! *(Laughter and applause.)*

(To another member of audience:) You are invited too!

Second questioner: I think first of all there is enormous outside pressure going on, I do not understand why people cannot sit here in the aisles. *(Clapping.)*

Beuys: There is the fire police, you know.

Ronald Feldman: If we wish to continue to use the auditorium tonight, we have to respect fire regulations . . .

Q: In the back there is a constant noise going on of people.

Ronald Feldman: I'm sorry, you'll have to bear with us.

Q: *(from the floor)* If Mister Beuys is a social

"Art is the only power to free humankind from all repression."

have to develop a methodology by looking at phenomena in reality. And all these have to be related step by step to the social structure. We have first to ask, in what part of the social structure does art live? Art as an element in the whole culture, is normally placed at the point of creativity. But we have to see what creativity means for the whole. Perhaps this is easier to do if we consider the element of freedom in creativity—let me go a bit quicker through the ideas, it doesn't matter if at first it's a little unsharp. At present this area has a special place in the society, and there are other areas in which to work, the law structure, economics . . . Here my idea is to declare that art is the only possibility for evolution, the only possibility to change the situation in the world. But then you have to enlarge the idea of art to include the whole creativity. And if you do that, it follows logically that every living being is an artist—an artist in the sense that he can develop his own capacity. And therefore it's necessary at first that society cares about the educational system, that equality of opportunity for self-realization is guaranteed. Under the present educational structure in the Western world, in private

but I am not very well acquainted with this kind of science. But perhaps it isn't a science.

Q: It is a kind of science, but there are artists like Dali, Robert Indiana, who have used it as an art medium.

Beuys: This science could have similar interests to my interests, to look for the whole, if you say "holo", from the Greek "holos", meaning the whole. But I'm not very well-informed about it. Could you maybe give an example of how holography thinks about the idea of art as a means for shaping the future? Is holography only a special science, or can holography supply models for the social structure? For questions in economics, or how to work with money *(Audience laughter.)* No, I ask only these questions because we have to slowly, step by step—and when I say slowly, I mean as soon as possible, yes—*(loud laughter)* but it has to be done carefully, one step after the other, only then can we catch a bit from the whole very complex thing. I dared to begin with, and to introduce the whole problematic from this field . . . to say that art is the only evolutionary power for history, that art is the only field that could govern the whole of society. Not only

artist, as he says he is, *(audience boos loudly; cries of let him talk, let him talk, general commotion)* I don't want to come on stage because I feel that er . . . I don't see evidence that this type of social gathering is effective for the communication of an artist's ideas, which could be done perhaps better through the use of media *(let me finish, let me finish, let him speak) . . .* The people who organized this . . . *(be quiet, let him speak)*

Beuys: But I think you have to ask if your action now is productive for the whole, yes, that's the kind of holography . . . *(general laughter, applause, right on, that got rid of him)* But perhaps you are right with your attitude. First we have to ask whether there is a possibility that this discussion could take place, and perhaps you can analyse later whether I am a social artist or not. You know, that could be the result of the free discussion. But first you have to ask yourself whether your intervention is productive for the whole. What you did just now was a kind of critique, yes. And I'm saying, is critique the only method to find a solution for the questions we all have in the society? *(Aaah . . . applause.)* If you only criticize . . .

But you are invited to come here (to the stage) and speak about the problems.

Q: Here's one solution: is it possible to amplify the discussion that's going on here so that it can be heard outside without the people moving in? Third questioner: (shouts from his seat) You said . . . that art is the most important motive force in history. (No no no.) That's a subjectivist point of view. It differs for example from Darwin . . . (laughter)

Beuys: No, I did not say this.

Q: If art is the most important force in history, then Tolstoy becomes a very important person because there is no access from the left for a subjective point of view in relation to art, except Tolstoy. (Loud guffaws) Tolstoy was used as an authority in Russia, and he collaborated with Bertrand Russell (screams of laughter, Caroline



Tisdall, writer for The Guardian, translates into German . . . whistling and clapping) Mrs. Browning was plagiarized by Oscar Wilde (Caroline explains gist of this rap to Beuys in German) (Reference to Mrs. Browning provokes more laughter and applause . . . What do you mean?) The question of time is in abeyance. In Russia they have time, due to the five-year plan.

"And when I say slowly, I mean as soon as possible."

(Whistling and clapping.) The motion is that the fine arts lead the mechanical arts . . .

Fourth questioner: (picks up mike) Does this work? I would like to address Mr. Beuys with the following question. In many respects I think he may have many valuable things to say as an artist (Whew! Audience laughs, at questioner.) I know his work briefly (more incredulous



laughter) but I don't think that's a criterion for thinking he has much to offer. Judging from the number of people who have gathered here as well as outside, the idea of a social force—in view of the physical pressure on this structure architecturally—I'm talking about a social phenomenon—I think it's very difficult to maintain a dialogue, social, artistic or otherwise, without some regard for the fact that people are waiting . . . and there's a social danger of people fighting and actually trying to break in and getting hurt in the process. I think that's of prime concern as an artist. What I suggest is that the media should get their artistic capabilities together and present this in a manner (Audience shouts, It's being taped!) . . . Taping is a possibility. There are many media possibilities for presenting Mr. Beuys' ideas to the public.



(Don't waste time now! Thank you, thank you!) I would like to ask Mr. Beuys whether he has a social concern for the people outside. Would you consider holding this at a future time? (He said he would, he said he would, let him speak!) I'll leave as soon as I have my word . . . (Finish! Finish! Off the stage! Clapping, cheers.)

Beuys: Yes, you see how dangerous a discussion can be . . . (cheers) It would be better for the whole discussion if you could come to the stage, otherwise everyone begins to talk.

Q: (angry) I'm going to leave now because I don't believe a meaningful dialogue can take place here. (Audience applauds approvingly. Commotion.)

Fifth questioner: I came here to listen to the philosophy of Mr. Beuys. He speaks elusively, and what I'd like is clarification of a lot of the points he's made on the blackboard. (Clapping.) I'd like to lead him through a question or two, as long as you want to tolerate it. The first one is, why did he put art higher than religion and science?

Beuys: I work in the field of art, and you know how during a period of Marxist ideology, fewer people are inclined to believe in the power of

the culture as a whole: they believe in the revolutionary potential of economics, class struggle theory . . . Therefore it's time to show that art means the power of creativity, and it's time to define art in a larger way, to include science and religion too. I mentioned that already at the beginning, but I know how difficult it is to understand too many ideas . . . (End of first side of audiocassette. Second side:) . . . you have only to look at the phenomena, and to think without prejudice, to see the mostly simply and monumental errors that nowadays characterize politics. That's the beginning of the process . . .

Sixth questioner: Is your art socialistic? In what sense is your art tied to socialism?

Beuys: But what is socialistic art? That is not what I mean.

Q: Oh. Then why is art connected to socialism? I don't understand. Do you mean the artist can exist only in a socialist society? (No, no, audience cries.)

Beuys: No. I mean the idea of art has to be changed. And you have to look for the springpoint, where the creative principle begins. Art as it's now understood is a special kind of



creativity; there are others, like philosophy or electricity. But it's very simple to see that all these activities are necessary for (designating) things in the world. An electrician, a physicist or a doctor has to form the problems he finds in the world, yes? But if you want to provide a fundamental analysis of these problems, you have to develop a special kind of consciousness-science. And then you find that the human being isn't only located in a physical context, that he isn't only incarnated in the physical world between birth and death . . . his thinking springs from another source. So we should not understand art as coming from complicated material processes; you find the person outside of conditions in the physical environment. The whole problematic of understanding the function of art in the society



is to change our understanding of ourselves and humankind—the problem is only to understand that man is a being who needs nourishment for his spiritual needs, and that if he could cultivate and train this primary nature, this spiritual nature, he could develop whole other energies. In this way the whole plan is a kind of energy plan too . . . And I'm saying that artists

working in the West and East and Far East, cannot arrive at a good result unless they look first to the point from where creativity springs. And you see culture related to freedom, because culture implies freedom: there can be no repression from any point. If there is a situation like now in Soviet Russia, where a writer like Solzhenitsyn is repressed by the system, because



he expressed a special result from his research—I'm using the term in an interdisciplinary way, because I want to give art the effectivity of the whole creativity. Then I can give it more power and force, I can catch all the participants who are already researching, widen the direction for all people—I mean the majority in an equal way. And when I say freedom, I mean freedom for thinking and researching and expressing the meaning (of that research and thought) . . . And no political power has the right to oppress any individual . . . But perhaps . . .

Seventh questioner: You talk a little bit like Nietzsche, but you're favorable to socialism, whereas he hated it. Your idea of art freeing people . . .

Beuys: I hate socialism too when it's only

PUBLIC DIALOGUE

mentioned in a vacuum. The results of socialism you can see in special places. What does it mean? Socialism means nothing, unless all the powers you find in human nature for freedom, equality, and brotherhood are included in the context of socialism. Socialism, democracy, freedom alone mean nothing, because freedom tends to become chaos when there are not orders established through a democratic decision by all people together, when there is not a border to chaotic activity, when everyone could do what he wants—dying too, murdering, all these things . . . There has to be a structure of laws, but not established from above by a minority of politicians or by economic interests. The basic law structure or the Constitution has to be realized by the majority—it means an elementary democratic process. And that's only possible



when everyone participates. But for this it needs a special ability: you have to learn how the democratic process functions. And this is where you have to look to the culture, and ask whether we now have a cultural structure which allows everyone to learn equally and freely to be conscious of and make new decisions (relating to) all the problems.

Eighth questioner: Getting away from politics, are you developing a new aesthetic for your own art?

Beuys: This is my understanding of aesthetics: I don't say that everyone has to believe my thinking. I am not the only researcher in this field, there are more and more people who want to research in this direction: I only want to provide an impulse for this kind of thinking, I don't want it to be construed as a dogma. That would be directly opposed to what I want.

Q: How would you describe your new



aesthetic?

Beuys: I describe it *radically*: I say aesthetics = human being. That is a radical formula. I set the idea of aesthetics directly in the context of human existence, and then I have the whole problem in the hand, then I have not a special problem, I have a "holography" (Beuys laughs; audience laughs, sympathetically). I don't know exactly what holography is . . . (more laughter)

Q: You mentioned a form of classless society where this form of education would be possible. Now do you consider art as a result or a procedure to attain this classless society?

Beuys: I think art is the only political power, the only revolutionary power, the only evolutionary power, the only power to free humankind from all repression. I say not that art has already realized this, on the contrary; and



because it has not, it has to be developed as a weapon—at first there are radical levels, then you can speak about special details.

Q: But I feel it's a kind of vicious circle: then you want to use art as the aim and the strategy (Loud banging on the doors.) But the people here in New York, we are just a bourgeois elite (laughter) so—I'm not attacking you—why not talk with the workers or the blacks in Harlem? Beuys: Why not? To this situation they are invited in an equal way. We have to go step by step. But why have they no interest to come? Because they are not accustomed to look for (this kind of) invitation in the newspaper, or to look for the posters. They have not learned to. The majority perhaps is in this position, they don't know the value of culture. Their alienation means that they are not aware of their own needs for mental nourishment. For instance, in a special ideology the needs of the majority are expressed by the idea of alienation. But exactly this alienation is where culture doesn't have a place—in factories, in the whole economic structure . . . For this reason I try to develop social sculpture as a new discipline in art—at first it is an invisible sculpture, and it's very uncommon to look for invisible sculpture. You see, I come to the United States as a sculptor, and the sculpture is to see nothing in the gallery of Ronald Feldman. I want to take sculpture in this direction: alienation has to be exchanged for a warm element . . .

Q: You speak about alienation of workers in the factories, but don't you feel that coming to New York City at the invitation of a gallery alienates you to the same extent, because it makes you a prisoner of the art world? Because you are both in the same boat, if you want to free yourselves.

Beuys: I don't understand. (Caroline Tisdall translates into German: Kunst Welt.)

Beuys: You mentioned a good term. You can go, as an artist, into the ivory tower situation . . .

Q: That's not what I mean. People have come here to listen to you, not because they believe you are going to start another revolution, but because you are a curiosity as an artist, and they came here more for aesthetic reasons than political, or at least half the people who came here that I know.

Beuys: You have only to ask yourself why you came here! (Audience shouts, right, right!)

Q: I asked a friend of mine why she came, and she said, because she liked your picture on the poster. (Audience laughs.)



Beuys: (grins) And why not! (Applause.)

Ninth questioner: I'm having a hard time dealing with what you have to say about art, because you've managed to make it so all-encompassing, so holistic (audience groans at obvious pun) that you haven't been able to define its boundaries. What are the boundaries? Beuys: At first I am more interested in destroying the narrow boundaries that come from a historical understanding of art. All these things in the past were not able to fulfill what Picasso demanded, that art has to be a weapon for all people . . .

Q: But you still haven't defined any parameters, any edges. What I think you're saying is that a discipline has to have a problem in order for someone to operate. A doctor can't fix someone unless he's sick.



Beuys: No, that for me is a very poor thing (laughter.) Then you run the danger of constructing a problem. But I am a phenomenologist—I look for the reality of the phenomenon. You have only to look—you have eyes, you have a sensory organization. This is another point of research: what is the sense construction in human beings, how is the nervous system organized, what is its capacity for reception? There is no need to construct problems, they are there outside . . .

Q: You said that art should encompass all the other disciplines, should become interdisciplinary. Aren't you making art the new politics?

Beuys: Yes, surely. Politics has to become art, and art has to become politics. That's exactly the point I'm making: all human activities have to become art, and they have to be organized by artists . . .



Caroline Tisdall, Beuys' interpreter.

(Second tape, side one: first part is inaudible.)

Tenth questioner: I wanted to know why you haven't been to the United States prior to this visit now. Was there some requirement that the country had to meet, in its attitude or its morals, before you would visit it?

Beuys: (Caroline Tisdall calls out, Joseph, Joseph, microphone! It's hard to hear.) I had the opportunity to come earlier, but the invitations always specified that I had to do something special, make a work for exhibition, they were connected to the wishes of a special person. And during this period, I no longer had an interest in exhibiting. And so I didn't come, not because I have anything against the United States, but I had too much to do in Germany . . . Then Ronald Feldman invited me, to do nothing in the gallery, invisible sculpture . . . □