

Writings or Lectures by Joseph Beuys

I Am Searching For Field Character

by Joseph Beuys, 1977, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western Man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993.



Only on condition of a radical widening of definition [of art] 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 deadline: 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 decentralisation (three-fold 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 time 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 world-wide cooperation.

Some quotations (found 2014-04-21 at https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Joseph_Beuys):

- This is a very important concept for me. If I produce something, I transmit a message to someone else. The origin of the flow of information comes not from matter, but from the “I”, from an idea. Here is the borderline between physics and metaphysics: this is what interests me about this theory of sculpture. Take a hare running from one corner of a room to another. I think this hare can achieve more for the political development of the world than a human being. By that I mean that some of the elementary strength of animals should be added to the positivist thinking which is prevalent today. I would like to elevate the status of animals to that of humans.
 - interview with Willoughby Sharp, 1969; as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 82
- 'Set III' is composed of nine equal elements...they fill the space, but I am not interested in the physical aspect of filling. I want the work to become an energy centre, like an atomic station. It's the same principle again: transmitter and receiver. The receiver is the same as the transmitter, only in felt. It is a totalization. The spectator becomes the program. The spectator, represented by the felt, equals the program.
 - interview with Willoughby Sharp, 1969; as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 84
- To be a teacher (Beuys was teaching on the Düsseldorf Art Academy, fh) is my greatest work of art. The rest is the waste product, a demonstration. If you want to express yourself you must present something tangible. But after a while this has only the function of a historic document. Objects aren't very important any more. I want to get to the origin of matter, to the thought behind it.

- interview with Willoughby Sharp, 1969; as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 85
- Provocateur – that’s exactly (the artist as provocateur, fh) To provoke means to evoke something. By making a sculpture with fat or a piece of clay I evoke something. I ignite a thought within me – a totally original, totally new thought that has never yet existed in history, even if I deal with a historical fact or with Leonardo or Rembrandt. I myself determine history – it is not history that determines me.. ..every man is a potential provocateur.
 - interview with Willoughby Sharp, 1969; as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 86
- Art alone makes life possible – this is how radically I should like to formulate it. I would say that without art man is inconceivable in physiological terms.. ..I would say man does not consist only of chemical processes, but also of metaphysical occurrences. The provocateur of the chemical processes is located outside the world. Man is only truly alive when he realizes he is a creative, artistic being.. ..Even the act of peeling a potato can be a work of art if it is a conscious act.
 - interview with Willoughby Sharp, 1969; as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America* compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 87
- Man is really not freeing many aspects. He is dependent on his social circumstances, but he is free in his thinking, and here is the point of origin of sculpture. For me the formation of the thought is already sculpture. The thought is sculpture.
 - interview with Willoughby Sharp, 1969; as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 87
- But one is forced to translate thought into action and action into object.. ..I am not a teacher who tells his students only to think. I say: act; do something; I ask for result. It may take different forms. It can have the form of sound, or someone can do a book, make a drawing or a sculpture. I don’t care..
 - interview with Willoughby Sharp, 1969; as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 92
- After I am dead I would like people to say: 'Beuys understood the historical situation. He altered the course of events'. I hope in the right direction.
 - interview with Willoughby Sharp, 1969; as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America* compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 92

- 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 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..
 - I am searching for field character, 1973, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 21

- 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 experience at firsthand – learns to determine the other positions in the TOTAL ARTWORK OF THE FUTURE SOCIAL ORDER.. ..THE FIFTH INTERNATIONAL IS BORN. (1973)
 - *I am searching for field character* 1973, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 22

- ..I mean that the idea of art has to be changed. And you have to look for the spring point, 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 body 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.. ..and I am 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 ay point. (1973)
 - *I am searching for field character*, 1973, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, pp. 31-32

- 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..(1973)
 - *I am searching for field character*, 1973, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 31

- I describe it (the new aesthetics, fh) ‘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” (reacting on a former suggestion of the public as a slight joke, fh) I don’t know exactly what a holography is.. (1973)
 - *I am searching for field character*, 1973, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 34

- 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. (1973)
 - *I am searching for field character*, 1973, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 34

- The ego must be developed, not for its own sake, but because it is needed by society. If you are only interested in self-realization then you cannot make a good painting. To do this you have to have thought about forming, and about how ideas of forming stem from history.
 - Joseph Beuys at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1974, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 12

- This kind of art school (The Art School of Chicago where Beuys gives a lecture, fh) is for me the least important. A spiritual structure is needed. If a person is an artist he can use the most primitive of instruments a broken knife is enough. Otherwise it remains a craft school.
 - Joseph Beuys at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 1974, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 123

- 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.. ..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, 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 means by a social sculpture ‘(Beuys goes to the blackboard and points out symbols for archetypical elements, plants, animals, minerals, soul which he had drawn before the discussion started)

- *A public Dialogue, New York City, 1974, as quoted in Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, pp. 25-27*
- I am interested in the creativity of the criminal attitude because I recognize in it the existence of a special condition of crazy creativity. A creativity without morals fired only by the energy of freedom and the rejection of all codes and laws. For freedom rejects the dictated roles of the law and of the imposed order and for this reason is isolated.
 - Quoted in Germano Celant, *Beuys, tracce in Italia*, Amelio, 1978
- My objects are to be seen as stimulants for the transformation of the idea of sculpture.. ..or of art in general. They should provoke thoughts about what sculpture can be and how the concept of sculpting can be extended to the invisible materials used by everyone. THINKING FROMS – how we mold our thoughts or SPOKEN FORMS – how we shape our thoughts into words or SOCIAL SCULPTURE – how we mold and shape the world in which we live: SCULPTURE AS AN EVOLUTIONARY PROCESS; EVERYONE AN ARTIST. (1979)
 - *Introduction, as quoted in Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 19*
- It is a kind of vehicle, you know. It’s a kind of making, spreading out ideas, that is what I think. It spreads out the idea. You must care for information and I personally try to make information available not only in a written way.. ... I try also to work with images, with fantasy, with jokes, with humor. It accelerates the discussion of the problem of a new society.. ..so I work coming from the idea of art as the most important means to transform the society.
 - *I put me on this train, interview with Art Papier, 1979; as quoted in Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 44*
- I had the feeling that another kind of life – perhaps in a transcendental area – would give me a better possibility to influence, or to work, ot to act within this contradiction.. ..This was my general feeling: on the one side, this beautiful undamaged nature form which I took al lot and had a lot of possibilities for contemplation, meditation, research, collecting things, making a kind of system; and on the other side, this social debacle that I felt already as a coming dilemma. Yes, as a child I was aware of it, but later I could analyse the debacle.. ..But I saw the relationship between people, I saw their thoughts, I saw their kind of expressionistic behaviour in every difficult situation. I saw all the time the unclearness in the psychological condition of the people. You know, that was the time of the Roaring Twenties and I felt that this expressionistic behaviour, this unformed quality of soul power and emotion of life.. ..I saw it, that it would lead to a kind of catastrophe. That was my general feeling (during his youth, fh)

- Interview with Kate Horsefield, 1980, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, pp. 62-63
- The only hope I had was when (in his youth, fh)I saw one day a photograph of a sculpture by [Wilhelm Lehmbruck](#), a German sculptor of expressionistic style. This was perhaps the only example, Lehmbruck, between my sixteenth to nineteenth years in which I saw a possibility for art to be principally of interest to innovate some things, instead of writing a very boring, naturalistic repetition of what is already done by nature.
 - Interview with Kate Horsefield, 1980, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 65
- This is now the time from 1952 until the next point in my life – this point was a kind of break down of everything.. That was not a point at all for me. The word “aesthetics” does not exist for me. I found out during all my time in an official institution, a state academy, that this use of the word aesthetics meant nothing, in my understanding. I couldn’t locate this meaning of aesthetics, which was a very nebulous, undetermined idea. I couldn’t put it in any real and concrete way in my work, my problem, my view. But later, after what I said was the next period in my life, I stated my understanding of it: human being is aesthetics. Aesthetics is the human being in itself.
 - Interview with Kate Horsefield, 1980, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, pp. 68-69
- I know a lot before a start an action. I know a lot about the necessity of the general idea of sculpture, but I don’t know anything about the process in which the action will run. When the actions runs, my preparation works, because I am prepared to do a thing without knowing where it goes. You see, it would be a very uninteresting thing – it would have nothing to do with art – if it were not a new experiment for which I have no clear concept. If I had a clear concept of solving the problem, I would then speak about the concept and it wouldn’t be necessary to make an action. Every action, every artwork for me, every physical scene, drawings on the blackboard, performance, brings a new element in the whole, an unknown area, an unknown world.
 - Interview with Kate Horsefield, 1980, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 73
- Already when I speak I need my own body, the physical flesh – it is a kind of clay to inform into – and I need my lungs, I need my tools here, existing in my anatomy; I need the physical conditions of other forms of life, in my brother or my sister. I must at once eliminate discussions, interpretations.. ..So, that is the second part of the problem; that the language, the thinking on the problem is a more important sculpture even than the end of the process existing in tools or in paintings, or in drawings, or in carvings. This transcendent character of information, in an invisible world, gives us at the same time the proof.. ..that we are not only biological beings, material beings, but first spiritual beings,

not existing on this planet – that we are only partly existing on this planet – and being involved in wood, in felt, in fat, in iron, in rubber(the materials Beuys used a lot in his ‘sculptural work’, fh) or whatever resources of this planet.

- Interview with Kate Horsefield, 1980, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 74

- That is for me the reason why I have to speak, and I have to speak more often than I do so-called art-work. You see, the complication is that I have to use something.. ..I have to use a traditional determination for ideas, so when I speak about art, I can only say that there are two kinds of art: the traditional art, which is unable to bring up art at all or to change anything in society or in the ability and the joy for life; and then, there is another kind of art, which is related to everybody’s needs and the problems existing in the society. This kind of art has to be worked out from the beginning, it will never lead to result in any physical form.. ..that is my meaning.
 - Interview with Kate Horsefield, 1980, as quoted in *Energy Plan for the Western man - Joseph Beuys in America*, compiled by Carin Kuoni, Four Walls Eight Windows, New York, 1993, p. 75