

Disruptions

Disruptions is a series that interrogates and analyses disruptions within and across such fields and disciplines as culture and society, media and technology, literature and philosophy, aesthetics and politics.

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Against Value in the Arts and Education

Edited by
Sam Ladkin, Robert McKay
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
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In memory, Stephen Rodefer

You know, interstellar gravity notwithstanding,
Someday I'm going to teach someone
How to do this, and take a rest.

36. Asger Jørn, *Guldhorn og Lykkehjul*. Translated in Fuchs, 'Asger Jørn and Art History', p. 136.
37. Asger Jørn, 'Postscript to 12th-Century Stone Sculptures of Scania', *October*, 141 (2012), 73–76.
38. On this distinction, see Richard L. Anderson, *Calliope's Sisters: A Comparative Study of Philosophies of Art*, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, 2004), pp. 256–63.
39. See Asger Jørn, 'Mind and Sense: On the Principle of Ambivalence in Nordic Husdrapa and Mind Singing', *Situationist Times*, 5 (1964), 156.
40. Asger Jørn, 'Guldhorn, sjernekort og folkekunst', *Demokraten*, 4.7 (1971).
41. Asger Jørn, 'Danmark og kunsten' (Museum Jørn Archive, 1953–1956), p. 33.
42. André Malraux, *Museum without Walls*, trans. by Stuart Gilbert and Francis Price (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967), pp. 82–84.
43. Malraux, *The Voices of Silence*, p. 44. Quoted in Douglas Crimp, *On the Museum's Ruins* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993), p. 55.
44. Jørn, *Concerning Form*, p. 207.
45. Malraux, *Museum without Walls*, p. 27.
46. Jørn, 'Danmark og kunsten', pp. 5–6.
47. Jørn, 'Postscript', p. 75.
48. Jørn, 'Postscript', p. 76.
49. Louis Réau, *Histoire du vandalisme: Les monuments détruits de l'art français*, 2 vols. (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1959), p. 10.
50. Réau, *Histoire du vandalisme*, pp. 10–19.
51. Gutorm Gjessing, 'Nord et Normandie', in Jørn et al., *Signes gravés*, p. 2, 47.
52. Asger Jørn, Noël Arnaud, and François Dufrêne, *Asger Jørn: Au pied du mur et un trilogie de l'artiste avec Noël* (Paris: J. Bucher, 1969), n.p. Jørn here echoes the Situationist references to the Comte de Lautréamont's statement that 'plagiarism is necessary. Progress implies it.' Lautréamont, 'Poésies', in *Maldoror and the Complete Works*, trans. Alexis Lykiard (Cambridge: Exact Change, 1994), p. 240. See the discussion in McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century*, pp. 29–31.
53. McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century*, p. 5.
54. 'Kunst er beaaendring, begejstring, inspiration eller agitation.' 'Blade af kunstens bog', 1947, Book I, n.p. (after p. 89). Museum Jørn Archives.

TEN

Art = Capital?

Reflections on Joseph Beuys's Das Kapital Raum
1970–1977

Christian Lotz

For Roberto and the falling water in Schaffhausen.

Art critiques such as those of Benjamin Buchloh, Thierry de Duve, and Rosalind Krauss have ridiculed the work of Joseph Beuys and his social and anthropological ideas to such an extent that it might be difficult to recover Beuys under the rubble of what is left of these devastating critiques. Buchloh, in particular, criticised Beuys's 'ridiculous presumptuousness about the idea of a universal synthesis of sciences and art',¹ the 'reactionary' and 'crypto-fascist' mixture of art and life, and the ahistorical, anti-modern, and acritical works and principles of Beuys's art.² As Buchloh has it, his works'

opulent nebulosity of meaning and their adherence to a conventional understanding of meaning, makes the visual experiment of Beuys's work profoundly dissatisfying. His work does not initiate cognitive changes, but reaffirms a conservative position of literary belief systems.³

Thankfully, what Buchloh conceives in 1980 as a return to a reactionary aesthetics can, from our contemporary viewpoint, be cor-

rected, as Buchloh's harsh treatment of Beuys's political, aesthetical, and social ideas, seen in the light of an apolitical and asocial post-modernism, is itself reactionary, since it overlooks the progressive nature of Beuys's work. Though, as de Duve has pointed out, the concepts of political economy that Beuys developed in the later phase of his life, as well as his utopian ideas, might be interpreted as 'a slightly grotesque farce', in what follows I argue that Beuys's aesthetics and the reception that it requires are more progressive than critiques of his art want to admit, especially since their positions remain ideologically tied to a pseudo-Left framework within which such critiques can veil their conservative position behind a superficial rejection of any positive projection of a different society.⁴ This falsely understood 'negative' position, which is especially found in Buchloh, ultimately leads to a confirmation of the existing structure of society. For de Duve's and Buchloh's superficial dismissal and the rejection of Beuys's social ideas — which are by no means fascist, since they centre on the creativity of the individual, require radical democracy, and are based on the rejection of anti-democratic state apparatuses — remain ambivalent and, to my mind, are based on a deep-seated resentment towards radical movements in the 1960s, including Beuys's manifold political engagements, as well as an impoverished understanding of aesthetics and art as apolitical (which most likely stems from cultural positions developed during the Cold War).

The best work to demonstrate this counterposition is Beuys's later work displayed in the Hallen für Neue Kunst in Schaffhausen titled *Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977*, which contains elements that Beuys used for performances in August 1970 in Edinburgh and in April 1971 in Basel, as well as for *Documenta 5* in 1972 in Kassel, where Beuys ran an 'office for direct democracy.' After Beuys's death his works have often been conceived of as by-products of his performances. As should become clear, this misconception is based on the understanding of artworks as 'fixed' things and not, as I will argue, as *processes* of meaning constitution that, in the case of Beuys, contain highly complex sensual, social, and interpretative relations, which are the opposite of Buchloh's reductive understanding of Beuys work. Hence, works such as *Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977* are not positive tools that Beuys used as means but, instead, *works* in the Heideggerian sense as something that 'is' in the process of its own meaning constitution. With Hans Georg Gadamer, I will also speak of *plastic images* [*Gebilde*]. In this vein, *Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977* as a hermeneutically understood plastic image should be

understood as a *Denkraum* (i.e., as 'spatialised thought' or a 'space for thought' that opens up and contains a vision of a non-capitalist form of social existence); as such, it should be understood as a work *against* (economic) *value*. The German word *Denkraum* expresses this nicely, since it points to a space where thinking can move around. Beuys's work, so to speak, provides a *room* for thought. Thinking for Beuys is a plastic process, creative, a formation, and a coming into being of something new. Indeed, in Beuys's art 'something fixed and reified is being moved'.⁵ The result of this process is both a *space* (the work in Schaffhausen) and a *process* (creativity as true 'capital'), which come together in the plastic image. As such, a counter-projection in the form of a counter-memory to that which exists (value) is formed. The future is coming to the fore in Beuys's work through the work of memory.

IMAGE AND PLASTICITY IN ART

In order to understand Beuys's installation *Das Kapital*, we need to first recover his concepts of artistic images and creativity. Though Peter Bürger argues that Beuys does not fall into the Bauhaus tradition, since the goal of his art is the spiritual transformation of the society and not the end of labour division in the arts and its new synthesis in buildings,⁶ we can broadly connect Beuys to this German tradition in art, since the conception of *art as a socially transformative praxis* is most visible in Bauhaus artists.⁷ The social aspect of Bauhaus work differs from other traditions that try to overcome the division between art and life by focusing on the individual, such as Friedrich Nietzsche. Instead, for Bauhaus artists and Beuys alike, social transformations are the result of *collective praxis*, in which the individual participates. In addition, Beuys's conception of socially transformative art praxis, but especially his conception of sculpture and image, can be traced back to writers and artists, such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Paul Klee.⁸ During his Bauhaus years, Klee developed a concept of image by means of what he called 'doctrine of formation' [*Gestaltungslehre*], through which he tried to trace back all complex elements of drawings and paintings to simple elements, such as point, line, curve, and relations between those elements, such as direction, tension, and movement.⁹ The idea is that art as the re-presentation of the world and reality is based on an organic coherence of all elements and that the image *presents itself as the dynamic result of its own genesis*. The image *creates* its own reality.

According to Klee's idea, an image is not simply the product of a formative activity; rather, the image *comes into being* through its elements as the formative principle of the whole. Understanding such a whole perceptually, then, implies that the image is not something fixed and given; rather, it is something that develops and forms itself through its elements and their perception as an *active* process between perception, element, and the whole (image). This dynamic, non-static, and non-fixed process can therefore be understood as a *plastic* process through which the image forms *itself* through its own *genesis*; it is like a gesture in which movement and meaning are inseparably intertwined. An image as that which we can perceive is a relation of the image *to itself*.

This concept, to be found in Klee, is very important for several reasons, but perhaps especially because we can see how it made its way into philosophical theorising, especially into phenomenology and hermeneutics. Gottfried Boehm, hermeneutically oriented art historian, introduced the term 'iconic difference', in order to refer to the temporal constitution of the image and the difference of part and whole in an image.¹⁰ The fact that we never see parts and elements of a painting simultaneously leads to a dialectical mediation between seeing, painting, element, and the whole, whereby the presence of the image is constituted by a synthesis of absent and present moments. Perceiving a work of art, in other words, is always forced to go back and forth between its parts and the whole. For example, a simple line on a plane can only be taken as an image of a line if the element (here, the line) is differentiated from the rest of the field *and* related to the whole. This process of 'relating' goes beyond gestalt psychology because it is an *active* constitution of structure *and* meaning through the work *and* our participation in the work *as* part of the work itself. The differentiation between the elements and the whole has to be introduced by us; otherwise, we do not see a something as an image *of* a line; instead, we see only a line. However, what we have in front of us is a representation *of* a line. In a similar fashion, *relating* transforms a monochrome painting from a simple coloured surface into an image *of* colour. Viewers who are unable or unwilling to 'relate' are unable to understand a monochrome painting as a painting. They will simply see paint on canvas. What Boehm calls 'iconic difference' is based on the differentiation that the image introduces, which is based on an *internal* negativity of the image formation. In contrast, external negativity means that the image differentiates itself from what it is not, which is a necessary condition for pictures. External negativity, in this context,

leads us back to the classical question of the theory of representations, namely, the question of how a picture is able to represent something that it is not. However, for hermeneutics external negativity is no longer a problem, since art images construct their reference, meaning, and denotated objects *internally*. Works of art create their own reality. Consequently, the iconic difference introduces negativity as an internal condition of the *formation* that the work presents, if we keep in mind that formation is used here for what the work *presents* and 'works out' in its representation.

Let us apply this insight from hermeneutics to Beuys: it is not the case that we have simply a representation of things in his installation room *Das Kapital*; rather, we encounter things that are *becoming* part of the installation itself, as its elements, which may be connected to Klee's ideas about the doctrine of formation [*Gestaltungstheorie*]. The components of the installation can be understood as organs of an organism that are organised around the specific form of the installation as a whole. But we need to go one step further in order to see that Beuys goes beyond the hermeneutical conception of images, since, as indicated above, he was influenced not only by Klee's conception of formation but also by romanticism, which led Beuys to extend the plasticity of a work of art to the whole range of formative activities by humans. One might say that he universalises Klee's doctrine of formation and thereby connects the whole doctrine of how images come into being to *all entities* around us, which is now seen as the result of a general human formative activity that is no longer restricted to artistic formation and how images come about *objectively*. However, at the same time, he *subjectivises* the entire creative process, by including the entire range of formative capacities of social beings and societies as a whole. As a matter of fact, he comes close not only to idealised aesthetics, such as Friedrich Schelling and early German romanticism, but also to the great anthropological tradition to be found in Ludwig Feuerbach and the early Karl Marx (I will come back to this in the next section). The formative principle, according to Beuys, is inherent in human capacities and human productivity, which should be seen as an impulse in all intellectual activities, such as speaking and thinking. This very German-romantic vision of the *formative* power of the human intellect and human sensuality is decisive for a proper understanding of the process of creative becoming that leads to a different concept of image as *plastic* image. It is very difficult to translate the German term *Gebilde*, as it indicates an image that *contains its genesis* and brings out his own formation as an *inner* result.

A similar word is *Gebirge*, which is used for mountain formations with an emphasis on *formation*. It is as if a mountain range shows up as its own process of formation. It is, in other words, a result of its own being. It is as if the entire world is a plastic image (i.e., a sculpted reality). As a consequence, the entire reality around us becomes related to art, and, according to Beuys, since 'plasticity ultimately is the law of the universe [Welt]',¹¹ being turns into coming-into-being. Even politics becomes a process of art and, according to Beuys, is to be replaced by a concept of formation [*Gestaltungsbegriff*].¹² Moreover, plasticity as a 'principle of time' and as a 'concept of the future' points to its own dynamics that contain their temporal horizons and possible re-formations.¹³ As a consequence, we can no longer speak of works of art as final results and final products of human activities; rather, they are never fixed or given as they change in time. An image, according to Beuys's romanticised vision of the world, has a plastic character, something that is the result of a process of formation. The world, we might also say, is essentially poetic, the position of which was held from Schelling up to Gustav Mahler, though, as I pointed out above, for Beuys, the poetic character is located on both the subjective and the objective sides and also includes the process of thinking itself: a 'conceptual image' [*Begriffsbild*] is something produced by thought in which the thought comes into being as a formation of its own aspects.¹⁴ The blackboards used in *Das Kapital*, including the material of the boards and the chalk and its traces, point to such a process, as they are the result of a thought process that needs to be reanimated by the thinking spectator. In fact, the entire installation and many of Beuys's performances are *thought images*, if we take into account that thinking is here understood as a *creative* process.

To render thinking visible, 'plastic forces'¹⁵ are needed that point to dynamic relations between the elements and indicate upwards, downwards, or calm tensions in the work of art, like notes on scores.¹⁶ The plastic image is a *composition*, as Klee pointed out. For Beuys there is no other access to humanity than the concept of plasticity and formation, as humans become self-related through the products of their creative and forming activities: *they are how they create*, the conception of which is also to be found on a larger scale in the early Marx, for whom the being of humans is determined by how they express themselves in their labouring and re-productive activities. As a consequence of this extension of plastic images to the entire mental and social range of activities, the viewer of art can no longer be conceived outside this process, as participa-

tion is itself *part of the creation* of the work, the idea of which can also be found in Gadamer's hermeneutics. Art, then, becomes a social activity in which potentially everyone can participate and no one needs to be excluded.¹⁷ This vision is deeply democratic, as it excludes selective access criteria, such as wealth, intelligence, status, and access to the market.

To sum up, the plastic conception of art and images has the goal of letting 'the anthropological human element become image-like [*Bildhaft*]', which counts not only for the artist but also for the audience of the work of art that needs to become productive by reacting its productive imagination [*Einbildungskraft*] as a *bodily and sensual praxis* within which both intellectual and sensual activity are synthesised in one imaginary activity.¹⁸ The entire process of perceiving drawings, paintings, and installations is very similar to participating in a symphony. In the case of music, 'listening' is a very active and participatory process, during which the organic whole needs to come into being through its elements and their relations. This whole needs to be reproduced by the listener in his or her productive imagination. In short, 'the task of art is to vitalize the image-like quality [*Bildhaftigkeit*] of humans.'¹⁹ This position can also be found in philosophers, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Hans Jonas. Jonas argues that human beings necessarily are *homo pictors* who have access to the reality as *their* reality only through their capacities to form images of and through this reality. This picturing process introduced both distance to and independence from reality, as well as an appropriation of reality as one that remains independent from practical appropriation.²⁰ However, I submit that we need to go one step further than Jonas does, for the productive imagination in Beuys's work is not simply an anthropological activity through which humans distance themselves from objects that reflect their own understanding; it also indicates the radical *externality* of understanding, memory, and intentional relations as being *in* things now seen as the *result* of human productive activity. Society, accordingly, is at first something *external* that gets shaped, formed, and brought about in the creative act. At each stage of its formation, it functions as its own material and formation. In Beuys's work, we find a Marxian and Feuerbachian vision of creativity and reality.

THE COMMONISM OF ART: SENSUALITY, MATERIALITY, AND MEMORY

Against the reduction of the arts to specific sensual fields and experiences, Beuys's work is based on a strategy to reactivate the entire range of human sensuality. This entire range, however, is understood as *praxis*, as 'activity of humans, in their labor',²¹ which, as we will see, is firmly rooted in ideas to be found in Feuerbach and in the early Marx (though a major source of Beuys's inspiration was Rudolf Steiner). Three aspects of the early Marx and nineteenth-century projections of socialist thinking are important for *Das Kapital Raum 1970-1977*: (1) Marx's concept of sensuality and reality as praxis, (2) the alienation from our sensual creativity through the capitalist mode of production, and (3) the thesis to be found in his later work that the true wealth of social productivity is not capital but collective social productivity, of which capital is only the social form.

SENSUALITY AS PRAXIS

Though Marx is clearly fascinated with this return to sensibility as the real foundation of existence, he accuses Feuerbach not only of overlooking the social-material determination of the sensual reality but also of ultimately mystifying sensuality, as Feuerbach's universal conception of sensuality makes it the core and essence of human activity as *human* activity. This is in contrast to Marx's thesis that sensual reality and its experience are the core of a non-abstract *social-material* activity. Moreover, Marx charges Feuerbach with abstractions in *The German Ideology*:

Certainly Feuerbach has a great advantage over the 'pure' materialists in that he realizes how human beings too are an 'object of the senses.' But apart from the fact that he only conceives them as an 'object of the senses, not as sensuous activity', because he still remains in the realm of theory and conceives of men not in their given social connection, not under their existing conditions of life, which have made them what they are, he never arrives at the really existing active human beings, but stops at the abstraction 'human being.' . . . Thus he never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total living, sensuous *activity* of the individuals composing it.²²

Feuerbach's materialism remains contemplative and not practical—that is, human sensuality is not analysed in relation to the historical development of production, productive forces, or relations of production (i.e., to the real life activity of humans who *reproduce* themselves through and by these activities). As a consequence, the Feuerbachian sensuous world does not appear as one that is *changeable* (i.e., as one that is able to be subjected to revolutionary activity). As the sensuous world is not simply the result of activity but *exists* only as and in activity, it is the true 'motor' and movement of history itself. When, in a famous statement, Marx defines communism as the 'real movement of history' and not as the goal of history, he brings together both the sensuous world as 'perceived perception' and the reproduction of this unity of perception and the perceived through labour.²³ As a consequence, according to Marx, we must not understand social reality as one to which we are related epistemologically; rather, we need to understand that every object of knowledge and perception is socially mediated as the *result* of social-productive activity. Sensuality is therefore something that does not belong abstractly to the human body; instead, it becomes a mediated category (i.e., one of social relatedness and one that is defined through its *objectlike* character). Marx writes,

Man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say, as a whole human being. Each of his *human* relations to the world—seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, feeling, thinking, observing, experiencing, wanting, acting, loving—in short, all the organs of his individual being, like those organs which are directly social in their form, are in their *objective* orientation, or in their orientation to the object, the appropriation of the object, the appropriation of *human* reality.²⁴

The latter point can easily be connected to Beuys. For example, an installation such as *Das Kapital* is not simply an object of perception; rather, it is itself a sensual *configuration* indicated through the socially (and technologically) mediated constellation of human sensuality through writing, hearing, speaking, and touching.

ALIENATION FROM SENSUAL PRAXIS

Human productivity and labour take on a specific social form under capitalist social conditions: on the one hand, labour becomes abstract (i.e., it only counts insofar as it is exchangeable), and, on the other hand, the results of human productivity take on the commod-

ity form (i.e., they are established through their universal exchangeability [= value form]). Both labour and the social reality established through labour are finally held together by the subjection of all market and exchange relations to processing money (capital). With the establishment of capital as the superior form of labour, all social relations become subjected to the goal of making more money for the sake of money. The fulfilment of human and ecological needs is pushed into the background. The exchange of commodities was always connected to a specific context of space and time; with the establishment of capital as the universally existing form of value, however, the relation to space and time becomes itself abstract and independent from local conditions, insofar as the money form can principally take on *every* content. For example, money as world money can function *everywhere* (i.e., entities in their exchangeability no longer depend on local conditions, norms, individuals, and so forth). Money as world money makes every entity, at least potentially, buyable and therefore exchangeable. Everything can be exchanged with everything. Accordingly, it no longer matters who exchanges what, when, and where, and the faster the transactions can be carried out, the more dynamic and expanding capitalism becomes. Consequently, abstraction does not mean that social relations disappear; rather, social dependencies increase, as everyone becomes dependent upon everyone else. However, at the same time, social dependencies decrease, as everyone's relation with all others appears accidental and becomes external to them. *Precisely* as this alienation, money is the expression of the resulting contradiction between dependency and independency. What formally depended upon norms, such as religion, loyalty, mythology, power, families, dependencies, and so forth, turns now into money relations and *therefore* establishes new forms of dependencies, namely, abstract dependencies. Moreover, because human productivity as a concrete bodily and *sensual* praxis no longer appears as such, it becomes external to human agents. As a consequence, human sensual praxis and its creative products now take on the commodity form, the consequence of which is that the true substance of all creative products, namely, labour and human creativity, disappears. Put in Beuys's words, the true source of all wealth, namely, the human as an artist, gets buried under its perverted social form, which is capital as processing money. Whenever capital-mediated world constitution occurs, we no longer participate in the whole of social relations, and instead we encounter each other as abstract individuals who are held together by money, capital, and the legal

forms belonging to it. Accordingly, it is not simply the case that we alienate ourselves from our being human; rather, as our self-realisation only occurs in social production, creativity, talking to each other, eating, and so forth, the capitalist form of reproduction establishes these self-realizations as *abstract* relations (i.e., as no longer shared *in* the objects we see, move, touch, change, create, and so on).

HUMAN CREATIVITY AS THE TRUE SOURCE OF WEALTH

As indicated, with the event of value as the universal expression of wealth under capitalism, the true source of wealth becomes buried under the abstractions introduced by the commodity form and the processing nature of money. Not surprisingly, then, Beuys takes up this Marxian tradition and re-centers it on creativity and humans as artists. Rather than focusing on labour alone, Beuys tries to show that the social individual, with her creative, intellectual, and sensual capacities, should be seen as the source of all social wealth: 'And when it becomes clear that human capacities are the real capital, then money disappears as the main economic value'.²⁵ Though Beuys's concept of capital is misleading and not very precise, what he has in mind is that instead of life capturing capital and money, the centre of our society should be that which *underlies* all value and monetarily reduced investments, namely, the whole range of human capacities to shape, form, and bring about human reality as social reality. Similarly, money, according to Beuys, is alienated in and through capital (i.e., it appears in a perverted form of 'M'). As surplus value (i.e., 'more money'), profit, credit, and interest money show up in perverted forms, and it is quite remarkable that Beuys had sophisticated ideas about these economic processes. According to him, like Silvio Gesell, money should be taken out of the investment process and brought back to its 'non-fictional' qualities. As such, it is supposed to function as a 'regulative principle of right for all creative processes [*Rechtsregulativ*]'.²⁶ In an interview Beuys refers explicitly to labour in the sense of human creativity as the 'real' capital of society.²⁷ 'To change the money system, that's the most important thing, the money system. Money and the state are the only oppressive powers in the present time.'²⁸ Switching to a non-capitalist form of social relations implies the co-operation of all senses with each other, the liberation and restoration of lost sensual capacities to live a life fully immersed in the lived body, and, in

particular, its relation to nature and its ecological situation 'on earth'.²⁹ Beuys frequently worked with non-human animals in his works. For example, rabbits are often used because the rabbit is here taken 'as [the] external organ [Aussenorgan]' of humans, indicating that the entire plant and non-human animal world belongs to the process of human creativity and human activity understood as one of its organic conditions.³⁰ He thereby also follows Marx, who claimed that capital undermines both the labourer and the earth as the two sources of all social wealth. The task of art is to extend the range and intensity of human sensuality through a dialogue with nature, including non-human animals.³¹ Consequently, materials become the most important aspect of Beuys's universe; as he puts it, 'I do not work with symbols; rather, I work with materials'.³² Beuys's ecological vision is visible in the role of the slate plates in *Das Kapital* as the concrete ecological place for the inscriptions of the mind and the intellect. The plastic image can only come about in an ecologically sensitive environment that is closely connected to nature, heat preservation, and the earth as the shelter of world projections. As Marx posits an object-mediated social reality and therefore sees in everything its genesis, Beuys's vision that we encounter in *Das Kapital* posits a social reality formed and shaped through social-creative practices. Beuys argues that in order to change society and its relation to itself and the ecology, we must

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 — and artist in the sense that he can develop his own capacity. . . . Under the present educational structure in the Western world, in private capitalist systems, this is not guaranteed.³³

DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST PLASTICITY: ON THE WAY TO ANOTHER SOCIETY

Given what we have said so far about the nature of plastic images and Beuys's enlarged concept of art rooted in early forms of anthropological Marxism, it should now be clear that the installation *Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977* should be analysed in this theoretical framework. To some extent, this work contains both image conception and social conception of human creativity, though it is presented as a work with (political) transformative force.³⁴ As Hans Dieter Huber has it, 'The whole installation therefore can be comprehended as a potential model for the creative transformation of indi-

vidual human energies into collective social processes for the evolution of the whole social fabric'.³⁵ As all elements of the installation go back to earlier happenings and performances by Beuys, we need to read *Das Kapital* as a (memory of) 'political action [politische Aktion]' that forms and presents alternative ways of thinking about creativity under the condition of capitalism. As Beuys puts it, 'Ideas of transformation, for a new orientation of the social, in our lives, in nature or in the economy . . . ultimately are a question of art, of an extended concept of art'.³⁶ The work presents a vision of 'how to unhinge capitalism',³⁷ through the transformation and opening up of all senses and thoughts to an alternative form of society, that is, to an alternative form of creativity and formative praxis that, ultimately, projects a vision of social and shared creativity that overcomes social alienation through a different relation between humans and materials. In the work of art, materials are not determined as a resource to be exploited but made visible in their ecological relationship, which is to say, made visible in their importance for the creative and social process.³⁸ As the work does not exploit the materials used for the installation and the performances, it gives us a 'reminder' and memory of a non-destructive, perhaps even mimetic, relationship to the earth. Political praxis as art praxis, then, becomes the *shaping* of the relationship between productivity, the society, and the earth. To put it more precisely, only the conception of political praxis as art contains a *different* and non-capitalist relationship between the whole and its elements. As such, the aesthetics contained in *Das Kapital Raum* is not based on destruction, which Beuys identifies as the contemporary nature of our political culture; rather, the work develops and forms new ideas about how we can live together in a different mode of social humanity, without it being simply a given result. Indeed, in line with the plasticity of the image, the work projects its vision of a different social reality as a process. As Franz-Joachim Verspohl remarks, Beuys's strategy to socialise the artist and to point to the creative potential of all humans enlarged the traditional idea of a harmony between art and life, insofar as the whole social process of reproduction (i.e., the specifically capitalist way of social reproduction) has to be taken into account.³⁹ *Das Kapital Raum* is based on ideas that all focus on the 'announcement of a new humanity, the class-less human being . . . whom we still need to realize'.⁴⁰ This class-less human being is a being who has dissolved all class distinctions in creative distinctions (i.e., class distinctions are turned into true distinctions between individuals).

During the *Documenta 5* Beuys ran discussions about democracy and a different political praxis as part of the happening and of the project 'honey pump': 'The real honey pump,' as Beuys puts it, 'was the active humans over the course of the last 100 days', which suggests that the plasticity of the image also contains the sentences, words, ideas, thoughts, and emotions formed during the exhibition, all of which come alive *through* and *in* the performance of everyone who participated in the discussions.⁴¹ The honey pump, some of which went into *Das Kapital*, presents the image of a social organism.⁴² but not, as Buchloh seems to think, as a fascist idea of integrating everyone into a unified political vision; instead, it opens up a different relationship altogether, namely, the 'sensually-intuitive path towards liberation'.⁴³ Participating in the work *Das Kapital*, speaking and thinking *about* it (as we do here right now), is the coming-into-being of the plastic image, as we carry out a different sensual and creative relationship with ourselves, others, and the earth, the point of which finally helps us understand Beuys's masterpiece as a space for thinking. Thinking, however, is here conceived as a plastic process, during which that which the thought process is about is formed into a self-relational image [*Gebilde*] or materialised memory.

DAS KAPITAL RAUM 1970-1977 AS A DENKRAUM

One of the best short descriptions of *Das Kapital* is the following:

One rather homogeneous subsystem of elements is formed by the group of blackboards, on which diagrams, sentences, formulae, words and drawings are written with white chalk. They hang from the wall, lie on the floor or lean against the back walls. Another subsystem is defined by its connection to electricity. Two 16 mm projectors are standing with two empty filmspools on a projection shelves. They are plugged into the electrical system by a white cable. Two tape recorders with empty spools and headphones are standing next to them on the floor. They are plugged in to the electrical system by a black cable. A microphone-stand with a microphone is connected to one of the tape recorders. The tape recorders themselves are connected to an amplifier and two loudspeakers. A quite separate subsystem is formed by the zinc bathtub filled with water, white linen and two flashlights attached on the handles. A zinc watering can, a white enamelled dish with a piece of soap in it and a towel are placed nearby. Between the microphone-stand and the bathtub lies a tin

lid with a heap of gelatine. A ladder with gelatine pieces is standing in the corner of the room. The installation is completed by a piano, a spear and two felt covered wooden laths.⁴⁴

As we can see here, we find two main 'systems' of meaning and sensuality in this installation: on the one hand, written elements regulate the background, and, on the floor, we find elements powered by electricity, which are related to speaking and recording. In being confronted with this first constellation, we note that they remain silent, as we do not find someone who writes, records, speaks, or projects images to the wall. All elements seem to have lost their life, which points to a meta-level of the installation itself, namely, to its overall *memorial* character. By our walking around the installation, by our perceiving and thinking about the installation, the work becomes transformed as something *active* and *alive* through our forming participation in the work. *Das Kapital* is therefore at first a transformation of sensuality and elements into an organic whole that can only be formed by moving the sculpture to an *inner* sphere, namely, memory, which is essentially a form of thinking of the past. Accordingly, the sculpture is the reconfiguration of all given elements into re-collected elements, and by this process of recollection, the image comes into being as a sculpted thought and, given the foregoing sections, a different projection of social reality. The sign-character of this work does not mean that it can be reduced to a text and be read as a text. On the contrary, the signifying character is the *result* and not the *condition* of the reanimation of the work through thought and sensual experience and its synthesis in the formed image. To use an analogy, the installation is like a mountain range seen as a formation of its own image-like character, which becomes visible whenever we understand the mountain range not as a given 'thing' but, instead, as something that comes-into-being and is the result of its own creative process. This creative process is the real enemy of capital (at least in Beuys's world), as it is, as we said above, the 'real capital' upon which human reality is based.

Accordingly, the whole installation is a spatialised and materialised memory. It is a memorial [*Denkmal*]⁴⁵ (i.e., a *place* for thinking). Often slate has been used as a metaphor for memory, and here it is used in its sensually present form, as a 'slate inscription' [*Schieferitzung*].⁴⁶ Slate is a material that can be traced back to coal; consequently, it contains references to the mining industry, ecological issues, and a concrete ecological horizon, which points to a different relationship to the earth in a different human setting that is mainly

characterised by communication as the centre of the whole work. The piano points to finding the right tone,⁴⁷ especially if we think of adjusting the piano. Low bass tones are used for everyday communication, which Beuys dealt with in his *Scottish Symphony* (parts of which went into *Das Kapital*). The communicative elements that are based on listening and speaking are echoed in the participatory formation of the viewer. We turn the silent communication into an active hearing by reactivating and 'living through' the attempt to listen to the work and to perceive the work. Listening to the work as listening to the silent communication, then, is not only a form of participation in the Gadamerian sense but also a form of listening as a process of meaning constitution. *Das Kapital* projects an image of the process of listening⁴⁸ through a process of articulation and meaning constitution in a plastic version. The transitions of this plasticity are related to the (now hardened) gelatin, which is moved by music frequency and speaking noises (microphone). Here communication is itself a plastic process that leads to a different formation and sculpting of material processes.

The thought-space is also visible in the 'appellations' that are contained in the installation. It is as if *Das Kapital* calls for action, and more specifically for transformative action. The piano calls for playing, the microphone calls for speaking, the blackboards call for reading, the spear calls for throwing, and the projector calls for showing. These elements do not simply call for being *used*; rather, they call for *becoming alive*, for becoming part of *praxis*, which is here defined as a praxis of speaking, listening, writing, and discussing a new form of social creativity and productivity.⁴⁹ All of this has an imminent political sense. These things, however, are *not* in a fixed state; rather, they move only in the totality of the work within which they become what they are. As dead objects the elements of the image turn into symbols that refer to something absent, which, again, was not the case during the time of their lived existence. During the performance these things functioned precisely in carrying out a practice. They were the bearer of action; as such, they were not visible as disconnected, separated, and alienated pieces. Our participation in this 'thought-space', then, needs to re-connect and re-collect the pieces and turn them into bearers of our living thought, perception, and sensual experience. Only then do they become alive. The work, in conclusion, calls for a different principle of society and human sensuality, namely, a praxis based on creativity and productive communication rather than capital. Marx's thesis that capital can only exist as the form of labour and that the true

wealth of societies should not be seen as capital, but in human collective labour, is here indicated by pointing to a human creativity and sculpted reality that is freed from the power of capital and brings the 'true capital' into our focus.

CONCLUSION

The relational network contained in the plastic image only comes alive if we take into account that all parts receive and play out their meaning in the organic totality of *Das Kapital*. As such, Bürger's thesis that Beuys destroys the traditional function of materials as being part of a composition should be rejected.⁵⁰ The interpreter in Beuys's world needs to stand, as do all materials, *in* the composition; as such, these elements are not simply self-signifying, as Bürger seems to suggest. In *Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977*, Beuys transforms all elements into artistic means towards a new social reality and communicable life. Perhaps, therefore, we could say that if we lived in a society that came about through human creativity and art alone, then, as Beuys has it, 'profit, private property, and wage dependency would disappear'.⁵¹

NOTES

1. Benjamin Buchloh, 'Beuys: The Twilight of the Idol (1980)', in *Joseph Beuys: The Reader*, ed. by Claudia Mesch and Viola Michely (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 116.
2. Buchloh, 'Beuys', p. 123.
3. Buchloh, 'Beuys', p. 122.
4. Thierry de Duve, 'Joseph Beuys, or the last of the Proletarians (1988)', in *Joseph Beuys: The Reader*, ed. by Claudia Mesch and Viola Michely (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), p. 142.
5. Johannes Stüttgen, 'Der Kapitalbegriff bei Joseph Beuys', in *Joseph Beuys und das Kapital: vier Vorträge zum Verständnis von Joseph Beuys und seiner Rauminstallation, Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977*, ed. by Christel Raussmüller-Sauer (Schaffhausen: Hallen für neue Kunst, 1988), pp. 88–127 (p. 95).
6. Peter Bürger in *Joseph Beuys: Die Materialien und ihre Botschaft*, ed. by Bernd Strieder (Bedburg Hau: Museum Moyaland, 2006), p. 15.
7. Beuys was heavily influenced by Rudolf Steiner and his anthroposophical ideas. In this chapter, however, I focus on the Marxist background in Beuys's intellectual and artistic universe. For Beuys's connection to Steiner, see Wolfgang Zumdick, *Der Tod hält mich wach. Joseph Beuys – Rudolf Steiner, Grundzüge ihres Denkens* (Basel: Pforte Verlag, 2006).
8. For this, see Matthias Bunge, *Zwischen Intuition und Ratio. Pole des Bildnerischen Denkens bei Kandinsky, Klee und Beuys* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996).

9. For this, especially see the excellent contributions in the exhibition catalogue, Fabienne Eggelhöfer, Marianne Keller, and Christian Ihöner, eds., *Paul Klee: Bauhaus Muster* (Madrid: La Fábrica/Fundación Juan March, 2013), pp. 39–126.
10. Gottfried Boehm, 'Bild und Zeit', in *Das Phänomen Zeit in Kunst und Wissenschaft*, ed. by H. Pafik (Weinheim: VCH, 1987), pp. 1–23 (p. 10).
11. Joseph Beuys, *Mein Dank an Lehmbrock. Eine Rede*, ed. by Lothar Schürmer (München: Schürmer/Mosel, 2006), p. 15.
12. Joseph Beuys, 'Erklärungen zum Werk "Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977"', in *Joseph Beuys und das Kapital: vier Vorträge zum Verständnis von Joseph Beuys und seiner Rauminstallation, Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977*, ed. by Christel Rausmüller-Sauer (Schaffhausen: Hallen für neue Kunst, 1988), p. 57. It is here that Buchloh sees Beuys 'fascism', but the term *Gestaltung* is deeply embedded within everyday German and is used for democratic politics too. Accordingly, Buchloh remains caught in his own ideological reductions. For this, also see Timothy O'Leary, 'Fat, Felt and Fascism', *Literature and Aesthetics: The Journal of the Society of Literature and Aesthetics*, 6 (1996), 91–105.
13. Beuys, *Mein Dank*, p. 27.
14. Beuys in Mario Kramer, *Joseph Beuys: Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977* (Heidelberg: Edition Staack, 1991), p. 15.
15. Stüttgen, *Der Kapitalbegriff*, p. 126; for this, see also Beuys, *Erklärungen*, p. 130.
16. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 15.
17. Joseph Beuys, *Gespräche mit Beuys. Joseph Beuys in Wien und am Friedrichshof* (Klagenfurt: Ritter Verlag, 1988), p. 129.
18. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 24.
19. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 24.
20. For this, see Hans Jonas, 'Homo Fictor. Die Freiheit des Bildens', in *Das Prinzip Leben. Ansätze zu einer philosophischen Biologie* (Frankfurt am Main: Insel, 1994), pp. 265–302.
21. Beuys quoted in Franz-Joachim Verspohl, 'Avantgarde und soziales Bewusstsein: Das Beispiel Joseph Beuys', *Marburger Jahrbuch für Kunstwissenschaft*, 22 (1989), 241–46 (p. 242).
22. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, 42 vols. (Berlin: Dietz, 1972–2013), III, p. 44.
23. Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, III, p. 35.
24. Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Werke*, XI, p. 539.
25. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 22. For this also, see Joseph Beuys, *What Is Money: A Discussion* (Forest Row: Clairview, 2010).
26. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 34.
27. Stüttgen, 'Der Kapitalbegriff', p. 103.
28. Joseph Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America: Writings by and Interviews with the Artist*, intro. by Caroline Tisdall and Kim Levin, comp. by Carin Kuoni (New York: Four Walls, 1990), p. 39.
29. Beuys, *Gespräche mit Beuys*, p. 127.
30. Beuys, *Gespräche mit Beuys*, p. 133.
31. Beuys, *Gespräche mit Beuys*, p. 132.
32. Beuys quoted by Wagner in Strieder, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 20.
33. Beuys, *Joseph Beuys in America*, p. 26.
34. For this, see Joseph Beuys and Michael Ende, *Kunst und Politik: ein Gespräch* (Freie Volkshochschule Argentat: Wangen, 1989); Joseph Beuys, 'Auffruit zur Alternative', in *Joseph Beuys und das Kapital: vier Vorträge zum Verständnis von Joseph Beuys und seiner Rauminstallation, Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977*, ed. by

Christel Rausmüller-Sauer (Schaffhausen: Hallen für neue Kunst, 1988), pp. 140–55.

35. Hans Dieter Huber, 'The Artwork as a System and Its Aesthetic Experience: Remarks on the Art of Joseph Beuys', *Die Hochschule für Grafik und Buchkunst Leipzig*, September/October 1989, <http://www.hgb-leipzig.de/artine/huber/writings/beuys.html> [accessed 2 January 2014].
36. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 21.
37. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 32.
38. For the role of materiality in modern art, see Monika Wagner, *Das Material der Kunst. Eine andere Geschichte der Moderne* (München: C. H. Beck, 2001). The role of materiality is also centrally visible in Volker Harlan, *Was ist Kunst? Werkstattgespräch mit Beuys* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 2001).
39. Franz-Joachim Verspohl, *Joseph Beuys: Das Kapital Raum 1970–1977. Strategien zur Reaktivierung der Sinne* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1984), p. 37.
40. Beuys, *Gespräche mit Beuys*, p. 127.
41. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 199.
42. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 199.
43. Verspohl, 'Avantgarde', p. 242.
44. Huber, 'The Artwork'.
45. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 29, p. 40.
46. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 30.
47. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 156.
48. Beuys in Kramer, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 157.
49. Fehr in Christel Sauer, *Denk-Kapital. Ideen zur Gestaltung der Gesellschaft* (Basel: Rausmüller Collection, 2012), p. 45.
50. Bürger in Strieder, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 15.
51. Beuys in Stüttgen, 'Der Kapitalbegriff', p. 104.