

THROWING FAT IN THE FIRE: JOSEPH BEUYS IN THE HEAT
OF REVOLT, WEST GERMANY 1967-69

BY

MARI DUMETT

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Department of Fine Arts

The University of British Columbia
Vancouver, Canada

Date 17.12.98.

ABSTRACT

Between the years 1967-69, the Federal Republic of Germany erupted as a space of political and cultural crisis, like other nations across Western Europe and North America, but as was the case with each, West Germany's own entanglement of historical pressures and contemporary reality rendered the circumstances of its crisis distinct. Within this space the period marked a significant shift in the receptive tide of the work of the artist Joseph Beuys. His art, particularly his performances known as *aktionen*, began to be considered more seriously and to be appreciated in ways it had not been before. Hardly signalling a remission of the controversy that had surrounded his work during the earlier years of the decade, this "appreciation" generated a phenomena of notoriety that encompassed a spectrum from adoration to zeal to vehement disdain. To some the work was even perceived as threatening. Thus, by the end of the decade, Beuys was simultaneously considered the *enfant terrible* of the West German art world, a clear and present danger to the existing educational order and the most important contemporary artist in the nation. Why was it that the reception of Beuys' work changed at this particular moment? How was it able to take on compelling force – like an epicenter located in the art world, but emitting shock waves that reached beyond this sphere's traditional confines? Seeking to explore these questions, this thesis takes the approach that answers lie in the work's complex relationship to the specifically German circumstances of crisis in which it was produced.

Given the copious documented on this historical moment and Beuys' canonical status, the amount of analysis on Beuys' work from this time is surprisingly modest with regard to English language reception. More importantly, however, is the not so surprising nature of the analysis that does exist. Beuysian scholarship is plagued by a positivist tradition within which: the artist is taken at his word, the *aktionen* are accepted as perfect visual correlates of his theory of Social Sculpture and ultimately he is valorized as a hero of radical West German youth in the 1960s. Beginning from a general barrenness of criticality, analysis in this tradition presents further dilemmas. Firstly, it elides the reality that the dynamic of crisis was more complex than an "us" (marginalized other) versus "them" (the Establishment) standoff. The left itself was

fractured. Often the same general problems were targeted — the archaic, authoritarian and oppressive hegemonic structures of society—but the “best” means to ignite change was debated, allowing for multiple projects of liberation to be set forth. Secondly, it negates the conflict inherent to a rhetorical position, by which, for example, a project “for social change” is potentially recoupable to non-critical, non-parodic (perhaps even reactionary) baseline effects. Beuys took part in a dialogue of social transformation, offering his own work as a particular type of historical explanation and intervention, and its provocation can only be understood in terms of a shifting dynamic of connections and disjunctures with alternate articulations, preceding and contemporaneous, emerging from within and beyond the art world.

The aim is to dispel the myth of Beuys, to deconstruct the constructions of the artist and the work of art in the period when they were first penned into West German cultural heritage books. The method chosen, however, is different from past deconstructive efforts. Rather than attempt to stock pile “evidence” on one side of the Beuys’ debate – was he a shaman or a sham? – it is the conscious mechanisms embodied in the work itself that are under investigation. In fact his work was more complex than an immediate placement allows. Through close critical analysis of the single *aktion Vacuum—Mass* of October 1968, it is possible to speak of the work in terms of the social and psychological cracks within which it maneuvered. Thereby revealing the fact that despite an initial appearance of amenability between his endeavors and the anti-authoritarian movement (a perception prompted by his general call to action), despite his rhetoric of “everyone an artist” (with its implied conceptualization of an egalitarian society), despite certain provocative anarchic impulses and despite subsequent texts that function merely as rhetorical reiteration it becomes clear that there were distinctions by which Beuys consciously distanced himself from the radical youth. Setting in place a veneer of radicality, he needed to work in a mode divergent from others in order to protect his constructions. Beyond a benign disparity, the conflicts and contradictions embedded in Beuys’ performance, as manifest most significantly in the space of the *aktion*, the practice of action art itself and the utilization of a symbolic language, signified potentially dangerous reifications of the very problems the youth and their theoretical mentors of the leftist West German intelligentsia saw as reasons for revolution.

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Introduction

I UNDERSTAND DEMOCRACY AS SOMETHING THAT FUNCTIONS LIKE A
KALEIDOSCOPE, THAT IS, NOT PERMANENT REVOLUTION, BUT PERMANENT
MOVEMENT, PERMANENT QUESTIONING BY EVERY GENERATION

RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER, *The Anarchy of the Imagination*

He does an excellent imitation of the “throaty cry of the wild stag!” He has a felt fetish! Sometimes he listens to nothing else but what a pile of fat has to say! Such were the curious rumors turning about in the minds of many individuals as they ventured off the street and into the Intermedia Gallery in Cologne, West Germany on October 14, 1968. Once inside, however, the passage did not end and intrigue only heightened as visitors moved through the exhibition space proper heeding a call to descend into the gallery’s cellar. There they were to witness *Vacuum—Mass, Simultaneous Iron Chests, Halved Cross, Contents 100 kg of Fat, 100 Pneumatic Pumps*, what was known as an *aktion* by the German artist Joseph Beuys. As eyes adjusted to the dim lighting, the qualities of the space itself morphed into cognition: brick walls crumbling as if they might give way at any moment compressing the space into the cement floor, the floor itself an uncertain foundation with its chips and cracks, and everything covered in a layer of dirt and dust. What kind of “art” claimed contingency on a space such as this?

The materials of the event were basic substances and objects. At center floor, a stack of hand held bicycle air pumps edged up to a pile of one hundred kilograms of margarine, each round retaining the shape of the tub from which it was recently extricated (fig. 1). Many rounds were boldly scored with a dark cross on one side, lending the fat a strange significance, which was only complexified as Beuys carried some in hand to the cellar periphery. The *aktion* was part of Beuys’ *Fettecken* (fat corner) series, and thus the space itself was prepared and distinguished by the molding of fat into a corner where it perpetually oozed and seeped, infiltrating the surfaces that it touched.

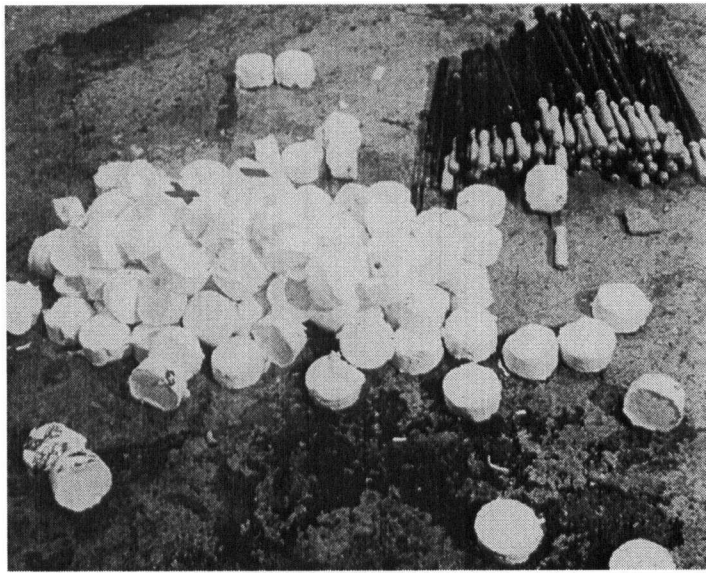


Figure 1. Materials for *Vacuum—Mass, aktion* 1968

As viewers stood along the outskirts of the space, not apprised of what to expect next, Beuys at center stage began dynamically splattering lumps of fat around the room through the valves of the broken pumps. Shot like margarine missiles, the lumps transformed into splotches of gooey innards upon collision with floor and walls. The pumps were also abandoned in disarray finding sticky stasis on the field of splatter — a chaotic mess with fat smeared here and there and adipose stains now marking the space in its entirety (figs. 2 and 3).

If under the assumption that the *aktion* would culminate after such dynamism, individuals were startled to feel a resurgence of energy through the ignition of flame. Wielding a welding torch, Beuys began constructing an iron chest in the shape of a half cross. A process during which viewers stood behind blue protective shields, further separated from the action, to protect their eyes from the extreme light (fig. 4). With all the solemnity and precision of a ceremony of fire, the welding was interspersed by Beuys' dramatic bodily posturing. Arms outstretched and head bent forward, Beuys like the iron chest, appeared to configure a cross. Or more accurately, a body on a cross. Holding this position for several moments at a time, standing up and bending down over the iron cross, Beuys remained deadly sober (figs. 5 and 6). In another moment he would reach for a swatch of gauze which he touched to his forehead. Perhaps construed as merely a necessity to dab the perspiration from his brow during the heat of action, if it were not for the fact that the gauze was pre-saturated with fat. The making of the chest resumed, and once intact, it became the receptacle for the materials of the chaotic process — 100 kg fat and 100 pneumatic pumps were collected and placed inside (figs. 7 and 8). Although ensconced by an iron cover, the contents were not left unidentified. Able to read a note tacked to the outside, those who missed the performance and who would only see the object in static display, were alerted that the iron cross was not empty but full (fig. 9).

As the molding, splattering, welding and filling proceeded, cinema stretched the dimensions of the performance through the face of one wall on which a twenty-minute film segment of *Eurasian staff*, another Beuysian *aktion*, was continuously projected. Via celluloid, Beuys was seen standing in the center of quadrilateral space demarcated by four posts running from floor to ceiling in signification of the four directions of the compass. Again, Beuys formed a corner of fat. The primary process of this *aktion* began when the “Eurasian staff” was revealed to the audience from beneath its canvas sheath. Nearly four meters long, the staff was made of copper and had a u-shaped crook at the top. This Beuys held like a shepherd and then raised to the ceiling carefully rubbing each of the four junctures (fig. 10). Between the raising of the staff to the four posts, Beuys redirected attention downwards to his feet where eyes fell upon iron soles pedally bound by straps. These oversized iron soles he would raise perpendicularly to a matching felt sole attached to the wall, in this way each sole became an arm of a cross. There followed a sequence of body and hand movements, Beuys vibrating from side to side in a trancelike state. Throughout the *aktion* solemn organ music and Beuys’ voice could be heard as he repeated “’o-o’ and

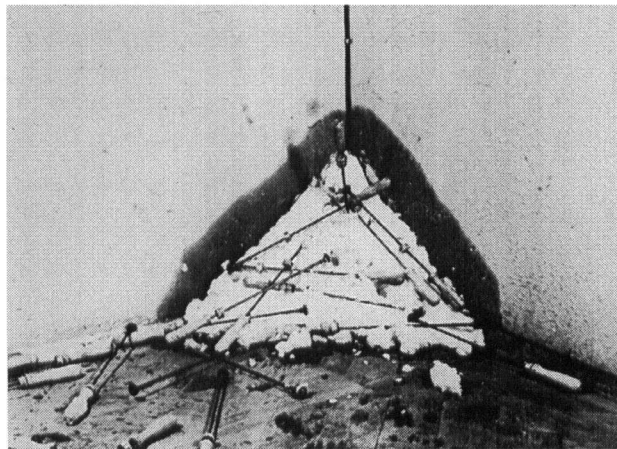


Figure 2. Fat corner chaos

Figure 3. Fat corner and splatter field



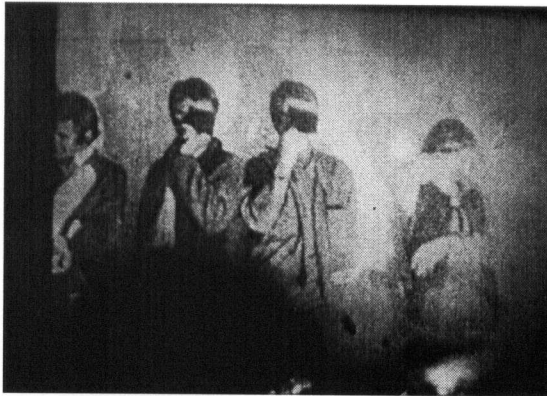


Figure 4. Viewers behind shields

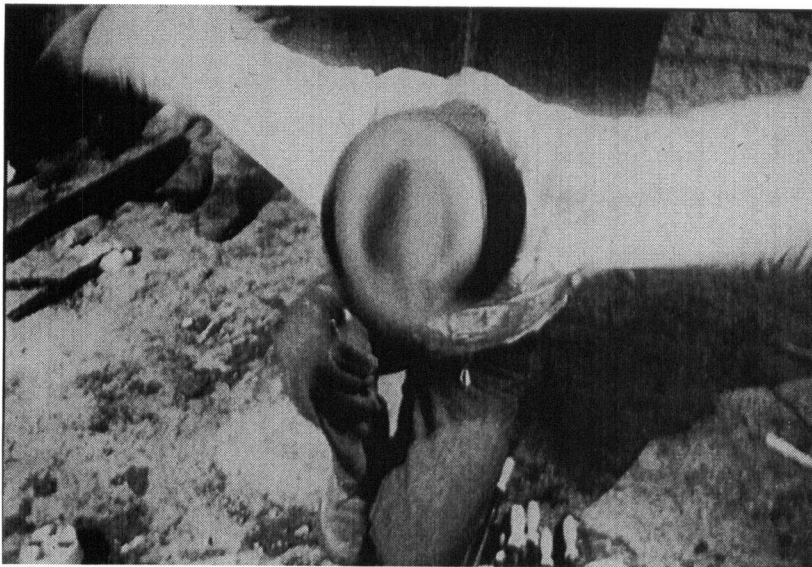


Figure 5. Beuys' bodily posturing

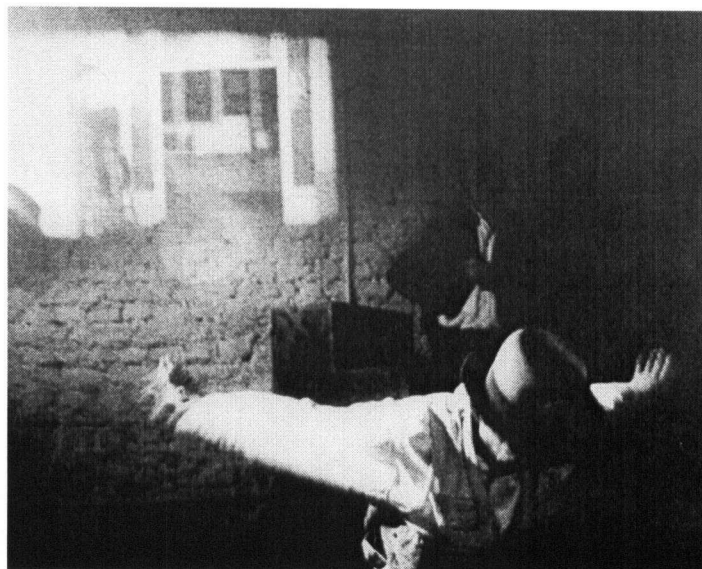


Figure 6. Beuys kneeling with
film *Eurasian staff* projected
on wall behind

Figure 7. Beuys packing
iron half-cross chest with
pumps and fat

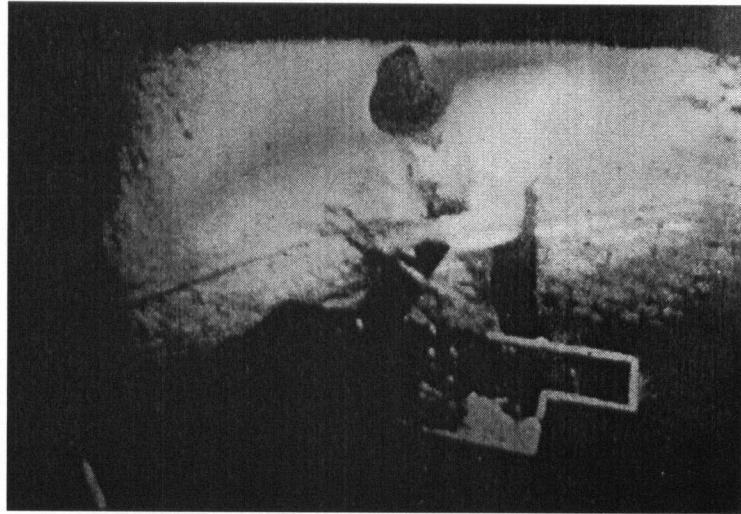


Figure 8. Open half-cross chest

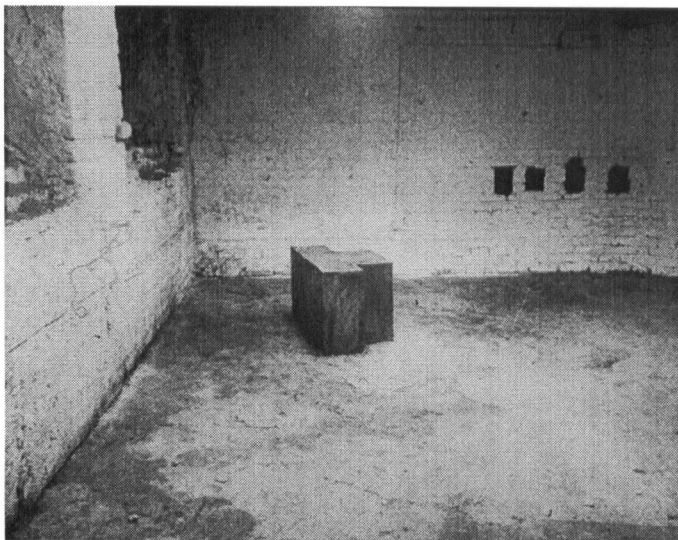
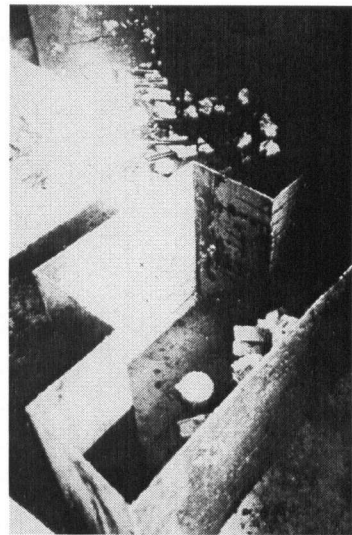


Figure 9. Full half-cross chest

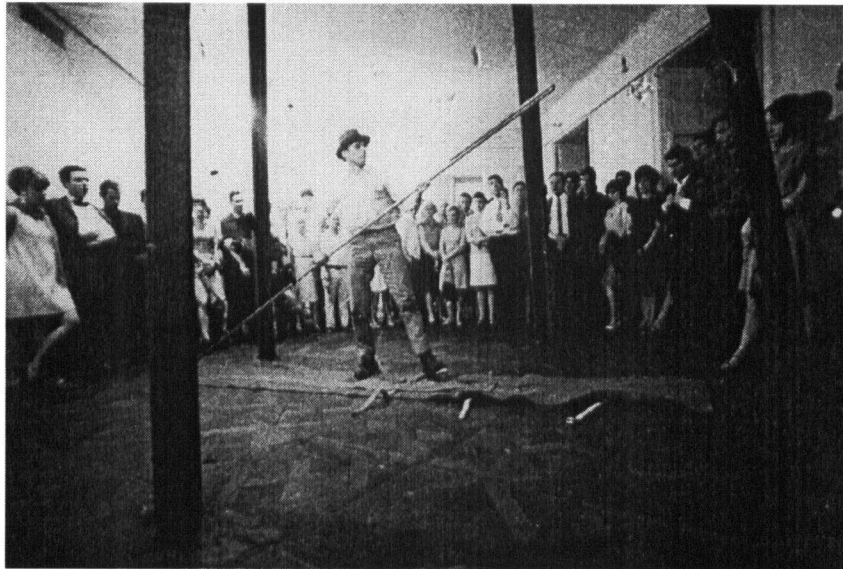


Figure 10. Beuys raising his staff, from the *aktion Eurasian staff*, 1967

'Bildkopf-Bewegkopf-Der bewegte Isolator' (Image head-Mover head-The moving insulator).¹

The cinematic presentation of *Eurasian staff* was a convergence with and an extension from *Vacuum—Mass*, utilizing similar materials and motifs in an alternate space and time, but taken in its entirety, what did it all mean? To many West Germans in 1968, *Vacuum—Mass* was a bizarre production. This is not so surprising. Although some of those in attendance may have had an awareness of modernist traditions of using everyday objects or performance to tamper with the conventional idea of art, for reasons we shall examine, much of even the art going public at the time was unfamiliar with the concrete historical examples of such strategies. Bewilderment set in as they watched the same tools that pumped air into bike tires suddenly pump fat in all directions, and the fat itself become the "paint-like" medium of the work that was splattered rather carefully brushed into particular shapes or patterns. What was one to think, especially when confronted by a visual vocabulary that said all of it had something to do with the cross? What is surprising, however, is the breadth of response and the disruption that could be agitated by a seemingly small event such as *Vacuum—Mass* and the rhetoric informing it.²

Beuys' work had been controversial before as he performed with Fluxus in the early sixties and more often as a solo act since 1965. He himself stated in 1969, "For ten or fifteen years people mocked me and said 'Beuys is crazy'." Perhaps the most notorious instance of this was his performance during a Fluxus event at the Technical School in Aachen in 1964. The entire program had been organized as a commemoration of the German resistance fighters who bombed the "wolf's lair" in the famed assassination attempt on Hitler, 20 July 1944. For reasons we shall soon examine, in 1964 and increasingly so through the end of the decade, the issue of resistance was still controversial. It was not until Beuys raised his Eurasian staff (in an earlier version of the *aktion* projected during

Vacuum—Mass) that the audience erupted, proving it was not just the subject of commemoration, but also the mode by which it was commemorated that was contentious. A conservative student actually leapt on stage and struck Beuys in the face, while his radical leftist peer refrained from taking the stage, but in lieu of himself threw a bottle of acid which spontaneously combusted (fig. 11). The event thus foreshadowed the debates around art and political activism, and even Beuys' role amid the two, that would heat up considerably over the next three years.

In the years 1967–69, during which *Vacuum—Mass* was produced, the Federal Republic erupted as a space of political and cultural crisis like nations across Western Europe and North America, and within this space of crisis the period marked a significant turning of the receptive tide for Beuys' work. It was then that people began to consider his work more seriously and to appreciate it in ways they had not before.³ This “appreciation”, however, hardly signified a quelling of the controversy surrounding it. Rather it signalled an expansion, marked quantitatively and qualitatively, as more people within and beyond the sphere of art took notice of his production due to its complex entanglement with the specifically German circumstances of the crisis in which it was produced. In many instances, this actually resulted in an exacerbation of controversy, especially in certain spaces such as the University to which Beuys was linked as professor of sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art. Why was the reception of Beuys work altered in this moment, and how was his work different than others, so much so that the differences proved disturbing? Why was an *aktion* such as *Vacuum—Mass* and the rhetoric that informed it no longer so easy to dismiss? And most significantly, why did certain groups in 1968, actually feel interrogated and even threatened by Beuys' activities?

According to Beuys, *Vacuum—Mass* was among his *aktionen* that most closely exemplified his overarching theory of Social Sculpture, a model by which the conceptualization of art, but also life itself could be transformed. Emerging from aesthetic practice, Social Sculpture was to be applied across all realms of existence, so that the creative processes normally reserved for the realm of art could first infiltrate and then merge with the everyday, eventually coming to define human existence. The definition of sculpture had become too static, too limiting, and in Beuys' view was meant to include the invisible materials utilized by everyone in daily life. This meant that “thinking forms – how we mould our thoughts or how we shape our thoughts” and “spoken forms – how we shape our thoughts into words” would become the tools of “social sculpture – how we



Figure 11. Beuys at Aachen performance after assault by student, July 20, 1964

mould and shape the world in which we live: sculpture as an evolutionary process; everyone an artist." This was Beuys rhetorical explanation of his artistic project, an idea that we shall return to. Yet the reactions to his work suggest that there was a complexity to an *aktion* such as *Vacuum—Mass*, which generated effects uncontainable by Social Sculpture's theoretical coffer.

As we shall see, there were conscious mechanisms embodied in the piece that constituted an epicenter, located in the arts, but triggering shock waves that washed over the traditional boundaries of this realm. As the reverberations moved out further and further from the performance, they produced a polyvalent web of frictions hitting the rough spots of the Federal Republic's social terrain and deeper into the wounds of the German subconscious. Beuys was aware, as were other individuals, that amid the cultural and political crisis certain issues were conflating spheres of West German life more than before. Individuals across fields (among them students, intellectuals, the press, and even religious authorities) were conversing on matters telling of the German predicament, but also on the dramatic shifts effecting the entire globe. Beuys desired to engage in this dialogue, but did so in a manner quite distinct from his potential discussants. He constructed a position for himself and for his work, at once contingent upon and informing of contemporary social beliefs and practices, yet articulated in a new language. Strange yet resonant, Beuys' vocabulary proved powerful, invested with an ability to confer pleasure, entice interest, generate anxiety and provoke disgust. Taking an analytic cue from Sidney Greenblatt's discussion of social energy, "The idea is not to strip away and discard the enchanted impression of aesthetic autonomy but to inquire into the objective conditions of this enchantment..."⁴ In other words, not to deny the fact that individuals became invested both to positive and negative effect with Beuys and his work, but to rediscover the political and cultural underpinnings that the effects themselves tended to efface. Taking the reactions as signs of contingency, we can ask how cultural production offered for consumption, such as *Vacuum—Mass*, was invested with power from its performative incipience.

Beuys' vocabulary manifest most provocatively in four different aspects of *Vacuum—Mass*, and like information signs on a roadway, these aspects give shape to the present course of critical inquiry. Firstly, the title both entices the viewer in its abstraction, prompting her to wonder how the terms vacuum and mass will be performatively played out, and signals to her the dynamics and cognitive level of Beuys' language. The title announces that the *aktion*, as did all of Beuys' work, will draw from the relational power of binary dichotomies. Although the import of this strategy was not fully discernible to viewers from the start, as we proceed with our contextualization, it shall become clear that the potential for (even volatile) metaphorical allusion began at point of nomenclature. Secondly, why was *Vacuum—Mass* held in the cellar? Were there things Beuys could do or an environment that he could create there rendered impossible somewhere else? And what were the convergences and collisions between the space of *Vacuum—*

Mass and alternate spaces at the time? Thirdly, what was significant about choosing an active means of aesthetic expression? Why was action in and of itself a “loaded” issue in 1968, in the arts but concomitantly in the culture at large? Fourthly, as revealed by the previous description (and as conspicuous in the title), *Vacuum—Mass* was undeniably not a literal or narrative read, but was based on an incrypted interrelation of action, object and body, it spoke in symbols. What was an avant-garde artist in 1968 attempting to do by presenting a symbolic language, and in what ways did this practice in general as well as the specific meanings it evoked play out to broad reaching effect?

The aim of this thesis is to deconstruct the constructions of the work of art and the artist within the specific historical moment of 1967-69, in attempt to elucidate the ways that they enabled Beuys to maneuver within the art world, but beyond this to jockey for position within the fractured and volatile political sphere at large. Out of the simultaneity of connections and disjunctures between alternate forms of expression in alternate fields of political and cultural production, Beuys emerged by the end of the decade as the *enfant terrible* of the art world, a clear and present danger to the existing order of education and the most important contemporary artist in West Germany. The frictional heat generated by his activities burned in two of, if not the two, most crucial spaces of cultural knowledge and power production in the moment. As we shall see, the spaces of education and the arts were mutually engaged in more socially significant ways than since the war, and Beuys placed himself in prime positions to capitalize on this dynamic. Beuys’ own intention was that his role should embody a blurring of the boundaries between aesthetic practice and education, and thus his activities as a Professor of sculpture at the Düsseldorf Academy of Art cannot be divorced from a performance such as *Vacuum-Mass*. With the advantage of retrospection, we shall revisit the same question posed by viewers in 1968 - What did it all mean? While pushing the dimensions of the investigation into the actual mechanisms of the *aktion* through the queries - how and why did it work to such significance?

By focussing on the mechanisms of the *aktion*, with an ambition to understand the ways such cultural production took on ‘power’, the study will more thoroughly explore questions raised by certain existent texts on Beuys, while avoiding the well worn, and at times problematic, paths taken by others.⁵ In his seminal essay, “The Twilight of the Idol,” Benjamin Buchloh revealed the general constructed and managed nature of Beuys’ work, proclaiming it “inevitable” that he would rise to a position of national heroism. Beyond this, however, and even more recently, his own investigation led him to characterize Beuys’ work as irrelevant. While fully investing in Buchloh’s approach of demythologization and deconstruction, I contest his conclusion of irrelevance, instead perceiving the “constructedness” as critical point of inquiry. Therefore in contrast to his more oeuvre sweeping discussion, the present project narrows the temporal and spatial scope of analysis based on the belief that attention to specificities in relation to the broader picture, be it local, national or global can ultimately raise an awareness of both.

This approach is strategic in the sense that it participates in the reorientation of Beuys' scholarship away from the "big debate" that has, as Beuys would have hoped, defined the field from the beginning. Attempting to answer the question, was Beuys an authentic artist or a fake, a shaman or a sham-man, critics have built up mountains of 'evidence' in two oppositional camps. Diverging critiques are a positive force in generating discussion, with meaning often lying in the in-between, but it seems that at this point in time there is no need to attempt to produce a scale-tipping analysis that will only be subsumed in the vast pool of debate once the other camp counters with its latest 'authoritative' text. And yet while attempting to avoid perfect placement at either oppositional pole, this study previously stated its intent to draw from a work that has its place as leader of camp sham-man. This association with those who choose to deconstruct and demythologize rather than reconstruct and re-mythologize is important (and possible without coming to the conclusion that Beuys was of no worth) for it seems there must be a continual effort to destabilize the amazingly resilient authority of the modernist notion of the artist as genius. It is one thing to acknowledge a certain level of awareness on the part of Beuys, but it is quite another to be content with rhetorical reiteration. As the geographer Matthew Gandy related regarding his experience at a symposium on Beuys as recently as 1995, "Speaker after speaker conveyed a sense of certainty and optimism surrounding his transformative Social Sculpture, and the few voices of dissent were met with a mix of suspicion and disdain."⁶ Risking such criticism, I do not intend to take Beuys' word for it.

This, as it should by now be clear, does not imply a preference for a third well worn path in Beuys scholarship, that of least resistance on which the *aktionen* are described as "open-ended," veritably offering something for everyone. This approach is preferred by those who hail Beuys as a primary usher of postmodernism, claiming his self-mythologization and cryptic vocabulary could lead anywhere rather than somewhere. By producing this "road to anywhere," a liberating project as the argument goes, Beuys purportedly participated in the dislocating of normative subjectivity (male, white) and its privileges, along with the plethora of body artists that emerged in the late 1960s. Importantly, however, not all of these body artists had such dislocation as a goal, and many of those who did were not successful. Amelia Jones cautions, "Any performative act is always recuperable to its nonparodic [noncritical] baseline effects...."⁷ Therefore, rather than begin from a point of investment in Beuys' work as ensuring or even enabling a critical reading of the privileged notions of authenticity of the modernist artistic genius or masculine authority in general, the present view considers such claims as specious. Holding instead that a reading of Beuys' work as infinitely open-ended would be possible only if we discounted an awareness of the temporally specific culture in which it was produced.

The Politics of National Identity and Cultural Schizophrenia

1968 witnessed the most publicly volatile expressions of a resurgent social ethos of "the possible" experienced by countries across the Western world between the years 1967-69. It was a belief, primarily emanating from individuals of the younger generation, that society was on the eve of real social transformation. Such idealism, as we know was not born of content, but rather of antagonism towards the prevailing conditions of society. Often characterized conglomerately as authoritarian, totalitarian and oppressive these conditions and those who propagated them were vilified as obstacles to "the possible," and therefore sparked the persistent assault of which they became target. Generally speaking, tensions pulsed most dramatically around a handful of issues and perceptions: the predominant role of mass consumerism in determining needs, lifestyles and everyday consciousness; rigid outdated structures and policies within social institutions, especially the universities; the role of the media in private and public life, which seemed increasingly able to manufacture spectacle in the interest of corporate profit or the agenda of the Establishment; and the ease with which the governments of purportedly democratic nations managed to eclipse social inequalities and the conflicted life of specific bodies.

Yet to characterize the youth movement as internationalist and to accept the period as a general state of cultural and political crisis is to elide the structural features and historical forces that distinguished each national context, not to mention each region or city. In the case of West Germany, the full implications of the rebellious interventions of the late 1960s cannot be understood without recalling the terms of post war reconstruc-

tion, for even an awareness of working in a persistent present could not dispel the "unmasterable" past that still loomed darkly. It was during the reconstruction years that the nation's complex of normative values, beliefs and behaviors that the youth would come to find so distasteful were reconstituted through a unique combination of external geopolitical forces and internal political ambitions and cultural needs.

Characteristics of post war West Germany are lugubriously cited in a multitude of historical texts, and while no lengthy exegesis is called for here, to delineate the most prominent, specifically German aspects of the society that had emerged by 1967-69 is to familiarize ourselves with the primary issues that conflated social spheres in the crisis of that time. Already aware that Beuys constructed his work to engage in a field-traversing dialogue of social transformation, to sketch the reality that those individuals so concerned found themselves implicatedly confronted with, in other words the issues with which they had to grapple if their projects for change were to avoid the trashbin of irrelevance, is to lay the terrain from which shall re-emerge grounded connections sharp enough to puncture through the obfuscating cloud of Beuys' original myth and ultimate Warholian superstar status. As our searchlight scans the social terrain we shall see, that despite the parallels and crossovers with the states of crisis in other nations, it was only from the landscape of West Germany that Beuys' work could cultivate to be reaped in such extremes.

Firstly, there was the issue of the post World War II state of in-betweenness. Fractured from half of itself and strangle held by two ideologically antagonistic big brothers watching closely over the East and West shoulders of its nation stripped bare, West Germany was expected to pick up the pieces while sitting tenuously on the frontline of the Cold War. As the new world superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union each knew what they stood for ideologically, economically and culturally. Britain and France (although Vichy proved a historical scab) also had the pride of Allied victory as point of national glory. If Germany had raised Hitler, the Allies had razed him. With this knowledge of their own implication, and left only with cultural traditions tainted by the blood of millions, what could the German nation possibly stand for? Even after, the United States proved dominant in determining its fate, to be aided and coerced into playing the green-backed democratic buffer zone between the majority of the Communist world was for many no sense of security but a solidification of fracture. Beuys introduced the problem of divisiveness to his *aktion* through a visual language of binary oppositions, but in doing this he engaged in a cultural discourse that had been taking place since the end of the War. If in the immediate post War years, the predominant discourse in the arts asserted not only a difference between Eastern and Western thinking and aesthetic practice, but a qualitative judgement, Beuys would re-examine this in a different way based on the needs of West German society of the late 1960s. Towards the end of the 1940s and through the 1950s, the project of many West German critics had been to develop a theoretical foundation for the inferiority and in-authenticity of Eastern styles of cultural production. The goal was to link only the Eastern half of the country, thereby relinquishing the West, to

certain things specifically deemed German that had become historically shameful. Significant to Beuys work as we shall see, Romanticism was characterized as the worst manifestation of the falseness of Eastern production. "...Romanticism had shown its supposedly true, dangerous side: irrational, potentially barbaric, primitive, and hence crypto-Nazi." In order to extricate itself from this association, the "true" western style was propagated as reason-bound in terms of Kantian historicization. Hegel, in contrast, was criticized for his "Eastern prejudices." As Yule Heibel stated regarding this post war discourse, "It is intriguing how pro-Western attitudes are equated with pro-reason ones, so that, given the political context, anti-East attitudes will easily ally with anti-rationalism and anti-Communism."⁸ These distinctions trickled down from attempts to reconstruct a national identity to the level of the individual and what it meant to consider oneself a German. It seemed imperative in this early post war moment to force the romantic characterizations of the German, primarily his unpredictability, untranslatability and warrior-like tendencies, into discursive remission if not expulsion, in deference to a reconstructed image of the citizen as lucid and reticent. It was on point of these geographically distinguished prejudices that Beuys' *aktionen* maneuvered in the "great divide," and it is important to consider in relation to the early arguments. For one, he took a different position regarding Hegelian theory from the espousers of Kant, but also from theorists (most importantly the Frankfurt School philosophers) who had attempted to revise Hegel's theory of the dialectic in accordance with their perceptions of contemporary reality. And secondly, he intervened in the post war simulacrum of collective and individual identities of negation, which in their extreme veering away from certain aspects of German culture and history created taboos, understandably horrifying to touch, but sustaining of the discourse and reality of fracture. What was Beuys' aim in addressing the issue of divisiveness in *Vacuum—Mass*, how did it manifest visually, and to what significance in relation to the overarching discourse of social transformation?

Secondly, there was the propagation and programmatic of *Keine Experimente!* as West Germany worked to build itself into a new Democracy under the shadow of Weimar. If France had a glorious legacy of republican spirit, West Germany had a legacy of republican failure that engendered the darkest period in its modern history. Recollection of the Weimar Republic conjured images of political fracture in the aftermath of the first World War, be it parliamentary infighting that generated no sense of authority or extra-parliamentary radicalism, strikes and violence that testified to the absence of central control. With forty years hindsight, it was perceived that the Weimar government's inability to control the dramatic changes ushered in by the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, including the rise of Communism on German soil and the 1918 German revolution the following year, had been its downfall.⁹ In this light it is easier to understand why Adenauer's policy of no experiments, that amounted to a process of ideological and political integration throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, was so well received by the majority of the population. The centrist-minded tone was set in the *Grundgesetz*, or basic law of 1949, and the

Parteiengesetz, both of which channeled all political practices, including citizens' right to vote, through a narrowly predetermined party system. The role of an opposition party was not explicitly addressed, and opinions expressed externally in a spirit of grassroots democracy were considered signs of a democracy in decline and thus to be corralled inward. The fact that spontaneous democratic energy was inhibited from the start, would have significant impact on the eruption of political exchange in the late 1960s, and given his notion of Social sculpture we can already speculate that at least in theory, Beuys project would have been categorized among the "non-conformist" brands of expression. Yet, as it emerged from the realm of the arts, one might conversely assume that with precedents such as Dada and Surrealism that embodied a revolutionary message, West Germans would not be taken a back by socially conscious artistic performance in the 1960s. This assumption, however, belies another specificity of the West German context, namely the impact of Hitler's suppression of "degenerate art," and the post war time lag before the projects of Dada and the Surrealists were widely known. In the case of Surrealism this was also tied to the post war suspicion of psychoanalysis previously mentioned. As Benjamin Buchloh recalls West Germany at the time, "Surrealism remained repressed almost until the late 1960s. Dada was first presented in an exhibition in 1956, which for me represented an extraordinary but isolated discovery."¹⁰ If someone engaged in the art world, such as Buchloh was, did not have familiarity with the avant-gardes of the early part of the century and indeed found them revelatory, the impact of socially engaged performative work on the less initiated would likely have been more jolting. The fact that people did react strongly to Beuys' work, begs us to consider the general import of earlier avant-garde models by 1968, and Beuys difference from them in relation to contemporary conceptualizations of the role of art overall.

Thirdly, there was the impact of the rapid economic success by now well known as the economic miracle, the realization of which was also contingent upon the umbrella process of integration. The tripling of the GNP between 1950 and 1960, and the turn around from unemployment at the beginning of the decade to labor shortage by decade's end, would not have been possible without, and indeed enabled the persistence of, a transfiguration of the antagonism between capital and labor. As Herbert Marcuse described it, the historically marginalized sphere of revolutionary fervor, was "bourgeoisified."¹¹ While it is a falsely held perception that the economic progress produced a classless society, it is true that by the early 1960s, a system that had struggled through rationing and housing shortages leaving citizens crowded in the dark and cold, could deliver the goods to a broader spectrum of the population. Government and business had convinced union leaders that they could get more for their dues through cooperation. Thus, while strong industrial unions could be formed, and workers did receive a certain increase in benefits, their bargaining power was severely restricted by an elaborate body of labor law that effectively debarred them from asserting their demands to the point of threatening the livelihood of the individual enterprise, much less that of the economic system as a whole. Labor re-

mained on the short end of the bargain after 1952, never achieving its primary political goal of equal representation on supervisory boards.¹²

One might argue, however, that the French who vacationed in the countryside during 1968, as the streets of Paris and other cities erupted with protest and violence, were also more affluent in greater numbers. So what was the difference in West Germany? Due to the predominant influence of the American model of industrial and cultural production and the added dimension of its "taboo" past, that which became known as "the culture industry" as early as 1947, or later the "consciousness industry" by the leftist writer Hans Magnus Enzensberger, was created much more rapidly and effectively in West Germany than in nations such as France or Italy, and thus served to distinguish its state of greater affluence.¹³ West Germans in the post war era, spurred on by the morale boosting Marshall Plan, desperately needed to create a realm of life advertisable to the world. If cultural traditions were soiled, non-military industrial and technological success was clean and modern, something the Western world would view as a contribution to the global economy. The argument is made that on the anathema of Nazi fanaticism and nationalist sentimentality the pride and pleasure associated with the rapid increase in production and purchase power filled (at least partially or superficially) a painful void, and as the pain appeared to be numbing a materialistic outlook grew in equal proportion to a degree greater among West Germans than among their post war western counterparts.

As he took up the issue of materialism in a dichotomous relationship to spiritualism, the former associated with the West and the latter with the East, Beuys' could intervene in the discourse on consumer culture of which the radical youth were so critical. He perceived a phenomena of commodity fetishism in contemporary West German culture, that seemed to preclude any chances for a more holistic existence. We have seen that his work incorporated the use of the cross, leading us to question whether it was religion that he perceived as a solution or whether religion was a part of the problem. Was there a challenge to capitalism being made? And, if labor was passive, was there an increased need and potential for "revolution" to be stirred from another social sphere, a void to be filled? These are the sorts of questions that analytically agglutinate to the cannonballs of fat Beuys shot out.

Fourthly, there was the legacy of Nazism and the crimes of the Holocaust that created unprecedented problems in terms of issues of guilt and consciousness. No where else did the question "how can we be a new nation without guilt" define the reconstruction of social structures and codes of social exchange in the aftermath of World War II. No where else had the "image of the individual" and the notion of subjectivity itself undergone such a crisis as in a land where people had either put faith in or been subjugated to the ideals, behaviors and paranoia of Hitler for twelve years, only to be left with a painful cavity. Yet, significantly, no where else had attempts been so great to publicly de-realize the past. This did not mean that even through the integration oriented fifties there was not a host of aggrieved cultural critics asking, "What is a human being?" and "Can a nation be

guilty?"¹⁴ Yet the vehement propagation of concepts such as Germany "ground zero" and *Schlussstrich* (literally, bottom line) determined that the past would predominantly be forced underground; where it would fester like vermin beneath the surface gnawing at individual psyches but also at the ideal image of West German "progress".

By 1967, however, the fact that two books dealing with the issue of German guilt and consciousness raising, one of psychology entitled *The Inability to Mourn* and the other of philosophy entitled *The Future of Germany*, could enjoy best-seller success indicated that the bleaker aspects of people's psychological and social reality were beginning to bleed more freely into the rosy image. It also signalled that whether suffering from the pain of victimhood, the burden of guilt, or a conflation of the two individuals were curious if not anxious and fearful of proceeding into the future without coming to terms with the past. The books, however, also signalled that the way to approach issues would emerge only from great controversy, a controversy in which Beuys' visual intertwining of past and present would itself become entangled. Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, the left-wing Freudians who produced the first book, developed a notion of collective German guilt which the philosopher Karl Jaspers (*The Future of Germany*) could not stomach, as he perceived it solely as a construction of the Western Allies that had persisted to paralyze the German people. For Jaspers guilt was measurable only on an individual basis, and attention to concrete historical facts was the means to raise everyday consciousness towards the prevention of "any madness" (a resurgence of fascism) that by 1967 seemed to him, and many others, as possible as ever.

While we can observe the potential dangers of a schema such as the Mitscherlichs, in which difference can be eclipsed to the point that by implicating everyone no one is held accountable for very real crimes, their work was extremely important in relation to Beuys. As we shall see, his performances converged in certain ways with the re-introduction of Freudian psychoanalysis after the years of repression it endured under Nazism. The Mitscherlichs' work played a prominent role in the reassertion of the unconscious as a valid site of scientific and ontological exploration, and albeit problematic, by extending this to society as a whole offered one example of how the individual could begin to come to terms with his or her place in the national collective. After the horrific exploitation perpetrated by Nazism, the individual's relationship to the "mass" was extremely tenuous territory to traverse even as late as the 1960s. The Mitscherlichs raised questions of the void of leadership after the fall of Hitler, and what this meant to Germans in terms of healing. If the Mitscherlichs, with the support of numerous admirers and students, considered themselves doctors of the German spirit, Beuys attempted to construct a similar role for himself from the sphere of the arts, also tackling the difficult issue of the individual's relationship to post war society. As he did this, however, those who shared Jaspers' eye on the mendacious also took seats in his audience to witness how the performance would contribute to the discourse on consciousness.

The avant-garde of course had a long history of critique of rational thought and attempts to raise social consciousness, and thus while an engagement with these issues by Beuys and others in the 1960s in West Germany was not new, it represented a re-emergence, and re-adaptation of issues raised by earlier projects. Dadaists had believed that "the potential power of art existed in its very relationship to life – not to the comfortable life of the bourgeoisie nor to the life of rationalized cause-and-effect relationships, however, but to the ubiquitous contingencies of life: irrationality, chance, inherent contradiction."¹⁵ The Surrealists in turn had attempted to supersede the predominance of rational thought in society through an exploration of subconscious desires. Looking to Freudian psychoanalysis for their own aesthetic theories the subconscious was given a central position in aesthetic production. Both Dadaists and Surrealists had attempted to transgress the normative bounds of cognition dominated by Kantian rationality, and in doing so set precedents that Beuys would take up and discard to varying degrees, and in a way different from his contemporaries associated with the prominent group Fluxus, contingent upon a very contemporary need to heal.

Topographies of Crisis: Plateaux, Cracks and Eruptions

A geographical and ideological state of in-betweenness, the mnemonic power of the Weimar Republic to rally popular support for a national program of no extremes, the economic miracle, and the absence of public consciousness raising towards reconciliation with the experience of National Socialism, these were the elements of West German society that rendered its postwar experience up to the mid 1960s different from other nations. Once basic survival in the immediate postwar years seemed tangible, an awareness of some of these issues and aims of quelling anxiety and regaining a semblance of nationhood, had prompted Germans to ask the question, how can we be a new nation without guilt? The answer agreed upon by the majority, either actively or passively, was to thrust collective energy into the global games of industrialization and corporate capitalism, and this answer seemed to turn out miraculously well for the nation. So why was it in the second half of the 1960s, that these issues came to the fore and the same question was asked again, but this time with a vociferousness not present in the initial query? Why was it that a generation of youth who had largely grown up more affluent than their parents and grandparents due to the way the question was first answered, began to be unwilling to allow the fate determining authority of their elders to stand? What were the perceptions of society that compelled the youth, drawing from their theoretical mentors, and a slew of supporters from various special interest groups to cohere during the years 1967-69, and not only call for but act out upon ideals of social transformation? Believing it possible to realize these ideals, what was it that the anti-authoritarians wanted and how were they going to get it? In 1968, as Joseph Beuys sat down to conceptualize the proceedings of the *aktion Vacuum—Mass*, intending it to emit a message of social transformation, what was

in his immediate midst as he walked down the street or went to work at the Düsseldorf Academy or read the German weeklies that proved the viable material of inspiration and the viable space of maneuver?

The generation of youth of the 1960s did not judge their contemporary reality by the past, but realized they lived in a society that did, that had at its foundation a tacit understanding of all things German bearing the stain of National Socialism. Yet over this foundation rose a facade that West Germany was well on its way to becoming the new paragon of democracy in Western Europe. As the West German writer Heinz Abosch would write in his critical book *The Menace of the Miracle* (1963): "Almost everywhere, in Western Europe and America, the conviction had been propagated of how perfectly things had turned out in Germany."¹⁶ Disbelieving this, the youth asked the same question again motivated by an desire to return to the moment of 1945 when they perceived that Germany had been forced to relinquish the reins of self-determination. Not literally of course, but discursively to return to the days of pre-American domination so that with an awareness of the changes that had occurred since, they might reclaim the chance to realize projects of a third way. Questions were asked as to how the uprooting of cultural traditions would effect the prospects for collective healing. Andreas Huyssen's articulations regarding the relationships between capitalist culture, historical amnesia and mnemonic desires can perhaps elucidate a certain psycho-social condition in postwar West Germany as it was drastically altered through the process of "the economic miracle".

Certainly, there is evidence for the view that capitalistic culture with its continuing frenetic pace, its television politics of quick oblivion, and its dissolution of public space in ever more channels of instant entertainment is inherently amnesiac. Nobody would claim today that we have too much history....¹⁷

In his discussion of the amnesiac nature of commodity culture, Huyssen contemplates the simultaneous obsession with the issue of memory. He recalls the that role of "historical fever" in Nietzsche's sense was important in that time for the invention of national traditions, the legitimizations of nation states, and to lend coherence to conflictive societies in the throes of the Industrial Revolution. In comparison, Huyssen argues, the mnemonic convulsions of contemporary society seem chaotic, fragmentary and free-floating. He locates the difficulty of the current conjuncture in re-thinking memory and amnesia together rather than as a binary dichotomy.

In light of these ideas, we can attempt to understand the simultaneity of "historical fever" and amnesia as it played out in late 1960s West Germany. Due to the onslaught of postwar Allied denazification programs, the pain and danger associated with remembering, and the concentrated rapid development of a mass consumer culture, the Federal Republic was ripe for the engendering of amnesia in the postwar period (which is not to say that it was a novel experience in this moment, but rather to argue that it was of a

particular texture and a new level of intensity). By the mid-1960s, however, with the maturation of a generation distanced from direct implication in the events of the War, the mnemonic convulsions erupted more dramatically into public life. In a conscious fight against the amnesia, historical fever burned among members of the younger generation, whose interests in re-introducing historical contextualization to the consciousness of everyday life lied less in the legitimization of nation-state, less in the solidification of tradition, than in the re-invention of cultural practices producing space for a positive perception of what it meant to be German. As the contemporary German artist Jochen Gerz relates of the experience of his generation and younger, "...even those too young to remember events, or born after the war, have always been aware of not knowing exactly how to behave."¹⁸

The American War in Vietnam was another crucial factor in the youths assertion of a new way for the country. Although cries of Anti-Americans could be heard in pockets across the globe at this time, and radical German youth bonded with their American comrades as the United States' maniacal agenda unfolded, the event had specific significance in Germany. Since World War II, West German identity had been inextricably bound to the will of the American government, and since World War II Germans had been the world's object of moral derision. American occupying troops still maintained bases on German soil, having integrated themselves into the German economy thereby becoming part of the positive perception of the miracle for some, while remaining but a putrid canker for the critical opposition. Vietnam marked the first instance in which critical Germans could point a finger in the direction of the American government, questioning the democratic and moral legitimacy of its foreign campaign and its claims to uphold human rights. Was now the time that West Germans could reassert their identity in a positive light independently of the United States?¹⁹

In 1967, it was hard to tell. Regarding the specific issue of Vietnam, many West Germans could see no point in ruffling their own feathers over America's foreign policy in a land so remote, when Uncle Sam had done so much to transform the red, black and gold of the Republic into a "true" democracy. These pro-American sentiments were bolstered by a pervasive propaganda campaign sponsored by the U.S. and conservative forces inside the country that bombarded West German radios and televisions with rhetoric of the force of good against the force of communist evil. On 21 February 1968, three days after the demonstration against the American war in Vietnam, the reaction was on. The transport and public workers union, the Berlin Senate, and Springer Press and some dignitaries called for a pro-American counter-demonstration. All public employees and workers in a large number of private firms were given time off. During the 60,000 strong demonstration, there were many attacks on men with long hair or anyone taken to be a student.²⁰ This was the same propaganda campaign, spearheaded by the Empire of the conservative Springer Press that controlled *Bild – Zeitung*, *BZ* and the *Berliner Morgenpost*, which equated the radical students with Nazis.

These responses were indication of the worms that continued to eat a society

rotten to the core. If Springer Press equated the students with Nazis, they could deflate this claim by simply pointing the finger directly at Chancellor Kiesinger as proof of where the former Nazis had taken roost.²¹ The students found respite in certain critical voices of the intelligentsia, such as heard in Gunter Grass' open letter to Kiesinger, "How are we to remember the tortured, murdered resistance fighters and the dead of Auschwitz and Treblinka if you, the fellow traveler of those days, dare now set the guidelines of our policy?"²² To the extra-parliamentary opposition the Federal Republic seemed more than ever, "headed towards a conservative restoration that embodied elements of the National Socialist past and a fascist potential."²³ The students called for a transformation to a more socialist system, one that was at once more democratic, equitable, and non-oppressive, and as we shall see they discovered a treasure trove of revolutionary ideas in the writings of the Frankfurt Institut. A group of individuals who could be esteemed as German examples of a persistent resistance to fascism and critique of capitalism since the 1920s. Their revitalization of Marxism tempered by Freudian psychology, offered the radical students a means to understand but more importantly fight the oppressive waves of conservative consumer minded culture that came crashing in after 1966.

If the dominant image projected was of a stable, affluent western democracy, this image began to crack. Unable to keep the lid on the worms corroding conditions beneath the surface, the government of the Federal Republic began a series of measures, implicated in a dynamic of action and reaction with the critical opposition. The 1962 *Spiegel* Affair can actually be credited as the initial tremor of domestic turmoil that shook attentions toward the government's tightening harness on daily life. The Affair involved two issues: freedom of the press, and the Federal Republic's nuclear strategy and defense policy. It became more sorted as *Der Spiegel's* accusations of the Defense Minister's "madness for power" and his collusion with American defense interests to plan a nuclear war brought West Germany's identity in relation to the United States again to the fore of political debates (all the more tense in this moment of the Cuban Missile crisis). The climax of the Affair manifest in the raid of *Der Spiegel* offices and the arrest of several staff members, as ordered by Adenauer and Strauss, the Minister of Defense. The blatant violation of free press by government henchmen and the apparently arbitrary way the search and arrests were carried out was for many an eerie reminder of similar SS tactics. The entire West German press condemned the action, and the esteemed *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* printed: "what stinks here, embarrasses not only *Der Spiegel*, not only the press, it embarrasses democracy in our country, which cannot live without free press...."²⁴ More astounding was the degree to which the Affair shook conservative commentators. A right-wing columnist of *Die Welt* wrote: "The question is whether the Federal Republic of Germany is still a free and constitutional democracy, or whether it has become possible to transform it overnight by some sort of coup d'etat based on fear and arbitrary power."²⁵ Thus it seemed to many that the democracy of *der Alte* was beginning to show its true face. Was the "crack down" a sign that the CDU/CSU leadership was "cracking up"? At

this point, just a "crack down" seemed apt, for despite the blatant violation of freedom of the press, the Spiegel Affair was but a foreshadowing of the second half of the decade.

With the formation of the Grand Coalition in 1966, the process of ideological and political integration enscripted into the Republic's foundation seemed complete. This parliamentary event, which occurred without prior election, merged the majority CDU/CDS (Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union) with the SPD (Social Democratic Party), leaving only the ineffectual FDP (Free Democratic party) as a vestigial opposition in the Bundestag. This was an extraordinary blow to the extra-parliamentary German left, for not only was the former voice of opposition now in cahoots with the conservative leadership of the former Nazi Kiesinger, it also rendered the future bleak. It represented a negation of the electorate's power to change the party of government once an election did roll around. Easily in command of a two-thirds majority, the coalition parliament was not acting as an elected body in which a multitude of opinions representing their proportions in the society held debates, but an automatic policy production machine. The power of a stable "democratic" government appeared to be at its peak.

A peak, however, implies a down-slide, and soon the West German government began to reveal indications of vulnerability rather than air tight control. If the *Spiegel* Affair had called up authoritarian tactics of the past, the proposed legislation of Emergency Laws was perhaps more frightening. In 1967, the government moved to pass policy that granted it sweeping powers in the event of an acute national crisis, be it natural disaster, nuclear threat or other yet to be determined situation. In any of these cases, civil liberties, elections and parliament itself would be suspended. This appeared to be the *Bundestag's* ultimate resignation of its stated responsibility as watchdog of government. Proposed under the auspices of crisis management, the Emergency Laws were enough to bring crisis to the government's door. The government's strategic safeguard was perceived by the critical German left as a fraudulent conceptualization of West German democracy.

In direct response to these events, West Germans formed the APO (*Ausserparlamentarische Opposition*), with the Emergency Laws serving as the major catalyst to the enlarging of the oppositional sphere, unifying individuals from a broader social spectrum. As in other countries at time, the student movement comprised the most aggressive marginal grouping (centered on the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund* (SDS)), but in contrast to elsewhere, due to the formation of the Grand Coalition the term extra-parliamentary opposition bore a significance singular to West Germany. More so in West Germany after the December 1966 merger did Herbert Marcuse's theoretical analysis of affluent technological society's capability to erode any and all political opposition become official political reality West Germany was a political contradiction as a 'democracy' ruled by a single party oligarchy. This, coupled with the similarities between the Emergency laws and the Nazi Enabling Laws were sufficient for many to believe Karl Jaspers warning that "the power of the oligarchy was such that a gradual shift to an authoritarian state, then to dictatorship, and with a subsequent war likely to follow, was harrowingly

possible." For many West German anti-authoritarians there was no choice but to speak and act from the position Herbert Marcuse termed the "Great Refusal", basically a widespread questioning of the status quo by those born 1930 and later, as coordinated by marginalized groups in a loosely constituted 'New Left'. The goal of the Refusal was a humanizing liberation from the new form of enslavement in advanced modern societies, capitalist but Communist too, namely an all-pervasive technological rationality. Perceiving the inability of any oppositional voice to speak effectively from within, groups such as anti-Vietnam peace campaigners, certain trade unions and sections of the critical intelligentsia joined the students in their ideological rejection of the institutions of the state, the rejection of the material values that defined the older generation, and shared their feeling that in industrial, political and cultural matters the same individuals were in power that had run the nazi machine, making a profit whatever the political turn of events. Thus, the marginalized voice of the APO was determined less strictly along class lines (much of labor was teased into the fold of power currents and the student leaders were largely middle and upper class), and more along the basis of age and interest.

As oppositional activity increased so too did government reactions. If the proposed passage of the Emergency laws caught the fearful attention of a large sector of the population, the first shooting of a student in the street caused the student agenda of tearing down the authoritarian structure of universities to circles beyond their own, and incited a wider percentage of the students to embrace the cause. The most fateful day was 2 June 1967 when Berlin police shot the student demonstrator Benno Ohnesorg, killing him while he attended a rally in protest of the visiting Shah of Persia, another undemocratic democracy supported by both the U.S. and West Germany. The question of violence was from this point on a part of public debates. Herbert Marcuse engaged in the debates a few weeks later at a conference at the Free University by saying: "The violence that occurred in revolutionary terror is very different from white terror, because the former implies its own transcendence in a liberated society, while this is not implied by the latter." Theodore Adorno would similarly state in a radio discussion that: "the prime task of education was 'debarbarisation' and that excessive violence by the police was undoubtedly barbarous, while such violence as occurs in situations transparently leading to more humane conditions cannot be condemned out of hand as barbaric." The stable splendor of economic success was quaking, and the social and cultural fissures erupting first at the Free University in Berlin became shock waves and rifts across the country.

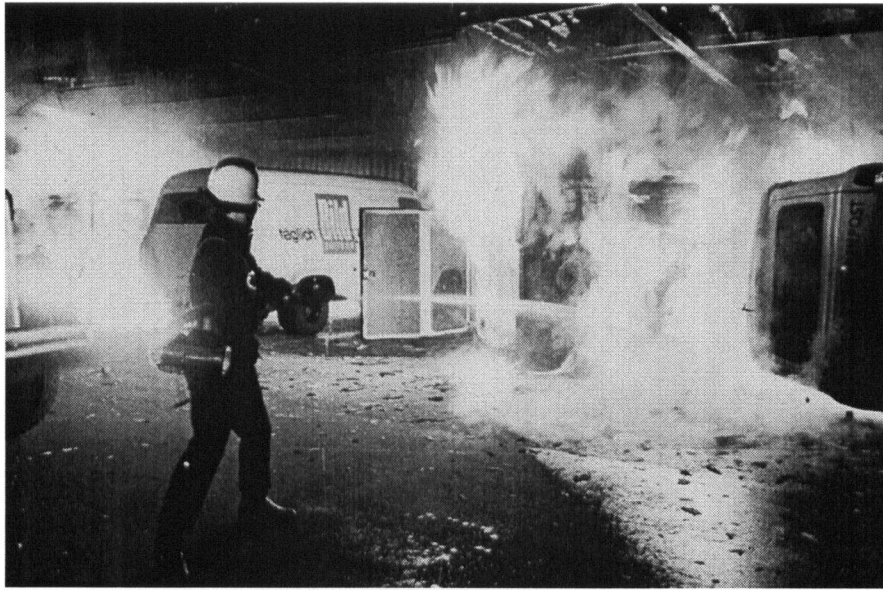


Figure 12. April 11, 1968 – Springer Press newspaper vans set on fire after the assassination attempt on Rudi Dutschke



Figure 13. April 13, 1968 – West Berlin police wade through Springer Press newspapers after student protesters emptied a delivery truck



Figure 14. Easter Week 1968 – After the assassination attempt on Rudi Dutschke, police take control with water and billy clubs.



Figure 15. November 1968 – During what became known as the “Battle of Tegeler Weg,” students attacked outnumbered police pushing them on the defensive.

It was in the spring of 1968, just months prior to Beuys' performance, that the crisis in the Federal Republic became full blown (figs. 12-15). The assassination attempt on the West German symbol of youthful revolution, Rudi Dutschke, sparked a wave of violence lasting the duration of Easter Holy Week. Significantly, as if in immediate reaction, it was just after this prolonged outburst, and the soon to follow spectacular events of May of 1968 in Paris when the student opposition garnered the support of thousands of French citizens, that the West German *Bundestag* passed the final version of the Emergency laws. It was obvious to the government that it needed recourse to constrain the individuals who were wrecking havoc of the stability of the Republic, especially since more and more youth were viewing dramatic rebellion as the only viable option for change. A survey published in *Der Spiegel* one month before the Easter riots asserted that two-thirds of students and apprentices in the Federal Republic between the ages fifteen and twenty-five identified themselves with the protestors and one-third with Rudi.²⁶ The SDS immediately claimed that the assassination attempt was "clearly the result of systematic agitation on the part of Springer Press and the Senate against the democratic forces..."²⁷ A few hours later two thousand students marched to the offices of Springer Press and smashed windows, overturned newspaper vans and torched them aflame. On Easter Monday, over 45,000 demonstrators in more than twenty towns in the Federal Republic and in West Berlin marched on Springer printing and publishing houses in an attempt to stop the presses. The street battles of the Easter holidays were compared to the havoc of the final days of Weimar, and this connection had added significance due to the parallels between the *Jugendbewegung* (youth movement) that had been crushed in 1933 and the new student movement that developed in the late 1960s. In 1970, the scholar Willibald Karl noted:

Both these historical and social phenomena represent protest movements against existing conditions...These 'existing conditions' reveal similarities in both cases: a bourgeois-capitalist society saturated by economic prosperity whose inner political disunity is concealed and seemingly neutralized by extensive arrangements between the parties and by the omnipotence of a governing bureaucracy. Moreover both cases reveal the same discrepancy between arrogant demands and the constricting realities of the international situation. In both cases the leaders of the movement come from upper and middle classes, from families willing to give their children a full school and university education. This similar background with basically the same status symbols and aspirations provided the starting point for both movements: a criticism of a rigid and archaic educational system which accepts traditional cultural values without question, which has no time for anything different or new, and which therefore hampers the development in the young of the powers of judgement and creativity.²⁸

Although there were also many contextual distinctions between the youth movements of the two periods and comparison should not become conflation, the similarities

of social and cultural conditions and demands between the young protagonists of the Weimar Republic and those in the streets of the Federal Republic, were enough to frighten many citizens in the sixties who could only see the bricks hurling from the hands of youths and did not understand the aims behind them. What was clear to most, however, was reported by *Der Spiegel*: "Left lying in the street were two dead, more than 400 severely or lightly wounded and the Federal Republic's claim to be an intact democratic state."²⁹

Maneuvers in the Cracks: *Vacuum* — *Mass* as Project of Liberation?

Descent into the cellar may have been taken with featherweight steps of hesitancy, but it also carried with it the exhilaration of uncertainty, the feeling that the unknown may hold something brilliant, something life altering. The anticipatory thoughts of art in the underground held all the potential for an alternative experience that only became more real as the space revealed itself in its glorious degeneration as a striking contrast to what had become by 1968, the sacred white box of the art gallery. For many, the edifice of artistic display was still the "temple of the muse". Although it was increasingly challenged, the tradition of the museum's origin principally as substitute for the patronage of the palace and church had not been overturned. The gallery was no more than a museum in microcosm, perhaps distinguished by its more immediate financial interest in art sales. With its pristine white walls displaying jewels of human creation, the gallery took on an air of sacredness suggesting a chapel for contemplation and community experience, based on consensus of taste, but increasingly, after the onslaught of the economic boom gave more people greater buying power, on the consensus of object-value and the prestige of being in the social echelon of the art collector.³⁰ As Allan Kaprow described the situation in the mid-1960s: "Therefore, we have the 'aristocratic' manner of curators, the hushed atmosphere, the reverence with which one is supposed to glide from work to work. Reverent manners became (and still are) confused with reverence for art."³¹ Despite the suspicions of many in the German New Left of the cultural production of the contemporary avant-garde as reactionary and "with no other function than to furnish museums and homes with luxury consumer items," for much of the art-going public the aura of the avant-garde had not been destroyed. It still carried the weight of non-conformity, things cutting edge, the appeal of shock and revelation. By 1968, however, as the critique of the radical left continued, avant-garde was "in", so easily reified that there was no time lag of subversiveness. Those uninterested in the potential of avant-garde art to effect social change, were often extremely interested in its going price on the auction block. Down in the cellar, the sheen of white was gone, there were no requisite fine stemmed glasses of red wine, no curators doting over the most likely buyer and Beuys appeared not in any saucy showroom fashion to make his entrance, but in his costume of rumpled vest and hat. It was at the start a refreshing change from art etiquette. The description of another Beuys' *aktion* gives an idea of what one of his events was like, "[Here] was the audience: the curious, the hungry seekers after novelty, people sleeping in their clothes, representatives from the press, family members and friends, the disconcerted and the timid, the contemplative one, those gasping for breath, those seeking explanations; people sitting, people standing, people." The image created is of a space in which gone are the rigid posturings, the programmatic turns around the room, the need to get one's sleep ahead of time. Gone it seems was the overall the etiquette that Kaprow defined as the norm. The space filled by diversely placed, spaced and engaged bodies stood not just in contrast to

the white box, but in liberation from it. Beuys' space in the cellar allowed for a new dynamic between individuals in the art exhibition experience, the kind of change radical youth were seeking to effect within society at large.

The alternative nature of the space did not, however, emanate only through a juxtaposition with the conventional gallery. Coming on the heels of a crushing spring which saw both the escalation and deflation of dynamic student revolts in Germany and France, and the even more cataclysmic episode of Soviet tanks rolling over Czechoslovakian aspirations, the performance in the cellar conjured spirits of resistance, past and present, of those who had been 'forced underground'. It raised questions of political convictions of what the notion of 'going underground' meant in relation to contemporary strategies of protest. With the disillusionment of Springtime, had the student resistance movement hit a juncture where there was a need to resist in a more clandestine manner? The cellar resonated as an ensconced and confidential space in which covert operations might take place. A space where upon admittance, individuals enter into a tacit or expressed covenant, pledging unity in action against a perceived enemy. Such were the spaces of underground resistance movements during World War II, and primarily of their own initiative, members of the young generation were re-discovering these activities that had for the most part been publicly de-realized by their parents and grandparents. As the issue of German guilt moved more prominently into public discourse (through the 1967 works of Karl Jaspers, the Mitscherlichs and others) students began visiting concentration camps and learning of the atrocities committed against innocent scapegoats. Yet if these revelations were devastating, the radical students in the late 1960s could find inspiration in the students who had carried the torch of resistance before them in the 1930s and 1940s (in much more grave circumstances). For instance, those in the now famous *White Rose* movement, who spent hours in subterranean spaces strategizing and printing anti-Nazi propaganda, several to their ultimate demise.³² Or they could examine the realm of art that was Beuys' precursor, given that between the years 1933-1945 avant-garde artists who did not emigrate were also forced underground. Commenting on the state of the arts by the 1960s, critic Edward Roditi stated that there were, "...a few original artists of real talent who had continued, even during the Nazi era, to follow their own idea in a kind of artistic "underground" or "resistance," rather than toe the line of dictatorial policies."³³ This was the role Beuys created for himself in the cellar, a maverick, an independent artist, an interventionist offering a strategy of resistance and transformation.³⁴ A role that the cellar only helped to cultivate as marginalized, undesirable and perhaps even dangerous vis-à-vis the mainstream.

In this way, *Vacuum—Mass* had impulses of what many students were already doing – creating alternative spaces within the everyday. The group *Kommun I*, which evolved in 1966 out of the Dadaist based politicized group SPUR, perceived the need to prepare the way for the revolution. "They...attempted to find new, anti-authoritarian ways of life—living together in communes, abolishing relationships based on pairing, and

resolving group conflicts through discussion—all of which had a certain fascination, not only for SDS members and students, but also for large numbers of young people.”³⁵ The basis for these types of activities was *One Dimensional Man*, the critique of capitalist consumer culture by Marcuse. As he stated:

Now it is precisely this new consciousness, this ‘space within,’ the space for transcending historical practice, which is being barred by a society in which subjects as well as objects constitute instrumentalities in a whole that has its *raison d’être* in the accomplishments of its overpowering productivity. Its supreme promise is an ever-more-comfortable life for an ever-growing number of people who, in a strict sense, cannot imagine a qualitatively different universe of discourse and action, for the capacity to contain and manipulate subversive imagination and effort is an integral part of the given society.³⁶

The inability to envision an alternative or worse to not even desire an alternative was an effect of contemporary culture that the student opposition hoped to challenge. One strategy was to begin creating alternatives within the exsistant social configuration so that once the revolution occurred there would be models to transfigure to the whole. The young revolutionaries recognized the failure of the 1918 German revolution to attain full realization, and sought to presuppose what the new social order should conceive.³⁷

Beuys’ work in theory seemed to share this *in futuro* sensibility with conviction. Aware of his persistent present, the alternative impulses evoked a forward-looking optimism, full of prospect and resolve first achieved, independently, through development of the ego, (not for its own sake, according to Beuys’ public pronouncements), but ultimately for the wider collective use of contemporary society, because the free thinking individual was needed by society.³⁸ It was in 1978 that Beuys would publish his ‘urgent message’ of “The Way Forward”, but the practical basis for the rhetoric was already present in his earlier notion of Social Sculpture and in his *aktionen*. Although the Art Historian David Bellman uncritically accepts Beuys’ own definitions for his artistic endeavors, and too readily labels them as open-ended and visionary, he does offer possible “expanding reference points” for Beuys’ theories that reveal a connection with the students’ anarchical motivations for the creation of alternative spaces. Two of these points seem most applicable to the present discussion in terms of practices that shift between the self and the social.

1. He perceives privilege of all kinds to be intolerable violation of democratic equality. He feels the need, as a mature person, **to be an equal among equals** in respect of all...rights and duties, and to be able to take part in democratic decision making at all levels.
2. He wants to impart and to enjoy solidarity...**Selfishness may indeed still be a determining factor in people’s behavior**; but it is neither an individual need nor an aspiration. It is a drive which rules and dominates. What the will demands is **mutual help freely decided on**.³⁹ (bold face words are my alteration of Bellman’s italics).

The space of the cellar immediately looked different, and allowed for the creation of a dynamic relationship between the viewer and the work of art. Yet, although Beuys may have from the start altered the relationship to the work of art, what about the viewer's relationship to the artist? Beuys stood at center stage while the viewers lined the periphery. This, tenuously conventional separation (a point we shall return to), however, was potentially amenable to the interrelation of the individual and the community in the particular strain of anarchic thought detailed above.

The anarchist's opposition to any strong form of state, their support either of extreme individualism without disturbing existing property regulations, or of a social organization based on local communes with community ownership and community operation of land and capital, could especially fit in with the suspicion of...a strong central government.⁴⁰

In an expansion of his own scientific-social discovery, the anarchist and geographer Peter Kropotkin wrote in 1888, "in the ethical progress of man, mutual support – not struggle – has had the leading part." In the cellar Beuys took the role of the maverick, the wilful individual, yet the space was communal, and the activity presumed to be on a trajectory towards the realization of what may not have appeared so in practice, but which were rational social goals. Perhaps it is more apt to recall the nineteenth century ideas of Michael Bakunin, from which emerged a conceptualization of anarchy allowing for a combination of collectivism and individualism that has resonance in the work of Beuys. Beuys was aware of Bakunin's co-operatives at *La Chaux-de-Fonds* constructed as the Republic of the Bees, where bees symbolized socialism, and he appropriated this notion of society as an organism in which parts functioned as a whole.⁴¹ In this regard, Beuys' work was anticipated by André Breton in his Surrealist project, "exploiting the persistent confusion between anarchism and Communism."⁴² As Henri Lefebvre noted had been true of the post World War I years, "the moment Marxist economists call the period of relative stabilization of capitalism, Monsieur Breton, ...had the (political) shrewdness to perceive that there was a general need for a definite doctrine and for a system propped up by logic; the hour had come for a universal call...."⁴³ In the late 1960s, when capitalism in West Germany was not just stable but an ever-pervading and controlling economic amoebae, Beuys too would recognize a need for a universal call, a potentially powerful one that could engage the need for a renewed sense of the strong German individual as well as the need for overcoming social fracture in a positive national identity.

Beuys' Social Sculpture was fashioned on rhetoric imparting the importance of social transformation "on a human scale and in accordance with human will." The anarchic spirit to change the world in the late 1960s rang "with the demand to live not as an object but as a subject of history – to live as if something actually depended on one's actions..."⁴⁴ At this level of theoretical comparison, Beuys' *aktionen* seem constructed to potentially realize the same goals as the frustrated youth — that self-determination begin-

ning with the individual be extended to society at large in a direct participatory democracy. Taken at face value, it seems Beuys' vehement opposition to any constraint on the freedom of the individual could be particularly attractive to those abiding by a view of a technological apparatus that absorbed any chance for self-assertion on a social level. At this juncture then, many advocates of Beuys eager to write him up as the hero of youth in the sixties, jump to accept similarity as equation. This conflation, however, made too easily, sets in place a potentially dangerous historical construction. Dangerous in that it fails to expand the analysis to include the important questions of where and how the goals were played out; thereby refusing further exploration of the relationship between self and social as it played out in Beuys' work, and the possibility of distinctions from the goals and practices of the politicized students.

The issues of place and type of action became more crucial by 1968, due to the fact that within the crisis at large, a wider space of criticism allowed for multiple projects of "liberation" to be set forth, and these projects themselves were often conflictual. Thus, the battle was more complex than merely a dualistic "us (the marginalized voice of opposition) versus them (the Establishment) standoff." It was also a contest of means, of who had the "right" way to effect change, and Henri Lefebvre's remarks on the prospects for any way to actually be the "right" way, or at least cogent, lend insight to a primary point of the debate: "Any revolutionary 'project' today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with **the reappropriation of space**, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda." (bold face mine)⁴⁵ Both Beuys and the radical youth were aware that they had to place themselves strategically within the social sphere based on where they perceived it most crucial to make their claims heard, and which spaces were most amenable to their aims. After spatial rumination, however, they arrived at different locations for specific reasons related to issues of control.

As a minority group, the radical students realized that if revolutionary transformation was to occur they needed to spread the word. Beuys shared this awareness of the importance of "the word" (in a way that as we shall see was more loaded than we might yet suspect), and chose to initiate dialogue in the gallery and the university. This was, in general, a step in the "right" direction according to youth who also ignited their first fires of discontent in the university. For the students, however, the magnitude of their agenda called for action beyond the confines of a space of "special interest". Revolution concerned not just students, but all citizens, and thus they needed a space in which they could make, not just those connected to academia, but an entire public aware that things were rotten in Deutschland. History had claimed this task for the proletariat, but if by the late 1960s the traditional harbingers of revolution were reticently agreeing to stick to the workplace, a new revolutionary body needed to be thrust into the physical space that had been left void. This contemporary state of things, as well as fighting words from theorists such as Marcuse, who supported the students as the engine of a new revolutionary force,

led the students to believe that a recreation (albeit reconfigured away from the orthodox Marxist conceptualization) of the proletarian public sphere was encompassed in "the possible". Thus, their metaphorical vision of social existence as an open and free street, would literally be played there. As one student protester recalled of revolutionary efforts in 1968, "[we had to] know how to get people out into the streets so that it could happen."⁴⁶

Like the students, Beuys was striking up discussions and even provoking heated debates. The students, however, performed their newly self-bestowed roles in a space where particular historical pressures bore in forcing upon them extremes of potential and the potential for extremes from which Beuys in the cellar was strategically, safely distanced. As Walter Benjamin spoke of the street in the late 1920s after Germany's revolutionary quake, but before the icy claws of National Socialism had dug in: "*Straßen sind die Wohnung des Kollektivs. Das Kollektivum ist ein ewig waches, ewig bewegtes Wesen, das zwischen Hauserwänden soviel erlebt, erfährt, erkennt und ersinnt wie Individuen im Schutze ihrer vier Wände.*"⁴⁷ Benjamin hailed the street as home of the crowd, and Susan Rubin Suleiman reiterated in her essay on Bataille in the street, the street is "where the proletariat might awake to itself as a revolutionary subject."⁴⁸ This is the potential that the revolutionary-minded youth of the late 1960s were hoping to tap into. In their desire to transpose words into actions, the actions that counted were in the streets as derived from a confidence in the power of directness and a romantic notion of authenticity. A mixture of exaltation and political action (at times conflated, and at others one eclipsing the other) was ideally to become a contagion that forced a flood of bodies into the streets – all citizens no longer able to withstand painful symptoms of apathy and acquiescence. Or even if the flood did not occur, the streets were where they could agitate to unleashing the restless energy, ever present between bodies in motion, but which presently seemed languorously lashed to the daily flow of activities running on a one-minded positivist track of competition and progress.

Berlin Dada had used the space of the street for the same purpose, attempting to "make their way" in them by disseminating political pamphlets and provoking general uproar, echoes of which rang more loudly in 1968. "In the sophisticated west end of the city we earned more jeers than pennies, but our sales mounted sharply as we entered the lower middle-class and working class districts of north and east Berlin. Along the streets of dingy grey tenements, riddled by the machine-gun fire of the Spartakus fighting and sliced open by the howitzers of the Noske regime, the band was greeted with cheers and applause"⁴⁹ Besides such Dadaist aesthetic anarchism, and their aims to destroy art as a bourgeois instrument of manipulation and oppression, the streets traced back to the socially conscious avant-garde of Russia, where for some time after the Revolution, abstract and non-objective art flourished, where revolution in form was perceived as expression of the Revolutionary spirit.⁵⁰

These models were all the more provocative to the intervention-minded youth in West Germany for they were still quite inaccessible, jewels buried by the dirt of Nazism that were only recently being dug up and polished for public show. Not yet fully reified through the German marketplace or in the art historical canon they could still sparkle with the shock of the “new” that had worn off to a greater degree in countries where exposure had gone unfettered. Dada had become more widely known in West Germany since its first exhibition in the late 1950s, but even as late as the 1960s, neither were widely taught in art courses where one might presuppose, although naively, a more liberal attitude. The post war failure to embrace such art was an indication that the brand of critique leveled against it by Hitler perhaps lingered, and that Federal Republic officials far from perceiving the work as gem-like and beguiling, reproached the art as threatening to the ideals they were attempting to cultivate, namely integration and the regeneration of a strong bourgeois-minded culture. The fact that Constructivism had its roots on Soviet soil was reason enough for West German academics in the Cold War era to refrain from displaying it, let alone publicizing its political implications. The aesthetic objects themselves were like time capsules of opposition, disruption and revolution — the hauntings of Weimar that would not dissipate. Chaos and danger reigning in the streets, neighborhoods unsafe to walk through, fragmented cities an everyday reminder of the fragmented state at large were the conditions that Grand Coalition officials and many citizens, determined that the Federal Republic would shine as Western Europe’s star of peaceful democracy, wanted to prevent at all costs. It was these same associations, however, that for the anti-authoritarians rendered the earlier avant-gardes deviant and valuable “discoveries”.

Conservative interests in the Federal Republic to a certain extent had historical outcome on their side, for the Spartakus insurrections of the earlier decades had failed. Yet, how historically savory or democratically exemplary could a violent defeat of radical socialists be when their bodies fell under *Freikorps* black boots, paving the way for the type of street control engineered by National Socialism. After 1933, the control of bodies in the streets manifest so spectacularly yet so horrendously in Nazi rallies that any subsequent reading of the street in Germany would have to struggle with this history. On this point, Susan Buck-Morss noted an awareness on the part of Benjamin of an alternate aspect of bodies in the street, that of a collective unconscious dreaming state. It was this facet that after 1933 in Germany proved itself most susceptible and receptive to the “political phantasmagoria” of Fascism. As Suleiman describes:

To its long-accrued history connotations of “progressive” [or threatening] revolutionary action, there now had to be added the disturbingly regressive connotations of mass psychology. Marxists had to recognize that the street was not only the place of socialist revolution leading toward a new dawn but also the place of Nazi marches and torchlight parades exploiting the darkest human longings for violence, war and death.⁵¹

In the late 1960s, past conceptualizations that placed both glorious and failed revolutions, police riot control as well as mass assemblies of fascist domination in the street, tempted and taunted both activists and reactionaries as they endeavored to define and claim the street anew.

While the question of "to whom do the streets belong?" is always contentious, due to the heterogeneous nature of the space, in moments of crisis, when traditional legitimizations of authority are under attack and the very fate of the social order itself is uncertain, the everyday game of stakes can transform into a battle for power to the death. The truth of this became all the more clear in the Federal Republic after 2 June 1967 when the first student shooting publicly burst the vacuous bubble in which many West Germans believed they could live. With its introduction of violence, this event more than any other, rather than relinquishing the past, determined that whether power would be usurped and lost or preserved, once again hinged predominantly on actions in the street.

Yet there remained the question of how? Perhaps it was not just the historical burden, mnemonically etched in the paving stones that Beuys avoided, possibly perceiving it too great an albatross to begin one's fight wearing, but also the strategy of spatial reappropriation the youths in the street pursued. If in the time of Rabelais, as M.M. Bakhtin wrote, carnival had the strength of subversion within it, indeed was but another term for revolution, this had changed by 1968. If to nineteenth century street dwellers, carnival turned the world upside down, inverting traditions, social hierarchies and roles to great delight, this was but another form of order to the radical students. Although some critics will still argue for the subversive power of Carnival that can occur through the potentiality of chance and spontaneity, it is important to remember that carnival had long before 1968 become a licensed affair, and as such was it perceived by the anti-authoritarian students. As Natalie Davis analyzed, carnivals as rituals "are ultimately sources of order and stability in a hierarchical society. They can clarify the structure by a process of reversing it. They can provide an expression of, and a safety valve for, conflicts within the system. They can correct and relieve the system when it has become authoritarian. But, so it is argued they do not question the basic order of the society itself."⁵² By 1968, strategists concurred to push anti-authoritarianism beyond carnival, as was implied by a student protester herself: "One thing that is quite new is to make people accept that you can oppose things without necessarily having ready-made solutions, to make them abandon any preconception from the outset."⁵³ To merely inverse the existent social order was to know more or less what you were reproducing, but the new sensibility was to perhaps envision ideals, but not specific roles or relations.

Thus, as much as the group *Kommun I*, attempted to create alternative spaces based on their ideals of how society should be, in the streets they developed a form of politics based on Rudi Dutschke's notion of "subversive action" that had nothing to do with a preconceived revolutionary outcome. *Kommun I* became famous, even beyond German borders, for their participatory political happenings that seemed to erupt out of

nowhere and in which hundreds of demonstrators took part. It was *La Fete* as opposed to the carnival! "...singing remodeled German Folk songs, imaginative, hippie-like dressing up, apparent suspension of sex-roles, and the avoidance of physical violence, which were all intended to make fun of the police."⁵⁴ The happenings were chaotic yet concrete manifestations of Marcuse's new sensibility of liberation.

The aesthetic as the possible form of a free society appears at that stage of development where the intellectual and material resources for the conquest of scarcity are available, where previously progressive repression turns into regressive suppression, where the higher culture in which the aesthetic values (and the aesthetic truths) had been monopolized and segregated from the reality collapses and dissolves in desublimated, 'lower,' and destructive forms, where the hatred of the young bursts into laughter and song, mixing the barricade and the dance floor, love play and heroism. And the young also attack the *esprit de sérieux* in the socialist camp: miniskirts against the apparatchiks, rock n' roll against Soviet Realism. The insistence that a socialist society can and ought to be light, pretty and playful, that these qualities are essential elements of freedom, the faith in the rationality of imagination, the demand for a new morality and culture...

Whether in retrospect we perceive implausibility in Marcuse's ideal location for social transformation, this was the spirit of youth in the late 1960s. The spirit of anti-order, the eruption of disorder at once alive and open, divided the black flags of anarchy and the red flags of Communism in the street. It sprung like wild flowers in contrast to rigidly organized Stalinist marches that embodied merely a transference to another order, another rigid ideology, another form of oppression. Creative chaos is an apt description of the new sensibility by which revolution and art conflated in the new human being at once revolutionary, artist, lover and maker. "Flower power" was not the two-word cliché it has since become, it was an attempt at redefinition and negation in the same vein as "free love." As the majority of the older generation saw youthful brains and libidos gone berzerk, it was for many of those experiencing it as Marcuse claimed "...a desire to see, hear and feel things in a new way...", a linkage of liberation to a negation of ordinary and orderly perception. Beyond simply a good time, the "trip" was considered a "dissolution of the ego as shaped by the established society"—a private experience of altered ego in preparation for the whole scale social liberation. The proliferation of drug use becomes particularly interesting at present for it represented a direct psychological intervention such as Beuys attempted through an art that emphasized the importance of non-rational intuition. While realizing the short-sighted simplicity of the politically revolutionary strategies associated with the new sensibility, their power in the moment to completely alter the accepted terms of cultural experience cannot be denied; and in certain elements—the linkage between revolution and art, the desire to transcend normative roles, and perhaps most importantly to the ultimate goal, the desire to transcend normative modes of cognition as an organism within the social environment—we can perceive resonance with the

transformation of the role of the individual propagated by Beuys – that every human is an artist within an expanded notion of art including all realms of existence. Their was a bohemian connection through which the *aktion* in the cellar suggests an utopic openness, an alternative but not yet determined vision of the future, a willingness to explore different modes of being that potentially required a tampering with the seemingly resolute acculturated ego, and ultimately a faith in the rationality of imagination akin to the world of the street.

Engaging in the same utopian dialogue as *Kommun I* and other actors in the street of a more holistic society, Beuys forged a spatial connection, certain strains of which deserve further investigation, yet when we attempt to take a few more steps across the bridge, recalling that physically viewers on that October evening themselves walked but a few meters to get from one space to the other, the bridge suddenly becomes a bit longer and a bit less stable under our feet. Descent into the cellar, was in fact leaving the open world behind to enter a space where insularity, subterraneity and darkness signified a historical use-value based on fear. "The kind of nervousness you have to experience to comprehend it. Somebody has to yell one loud word on the street and the crowds scatter through the doors of houses. It's a run for your life. At that very moment, machine gun fire can erupt from some hidden crack, or a hand grenade is dropped from a roof and its fragments tear open your guts."⁵⁵ This passage recalls the streets of Weimar fractured by revolutionary insurrections and reactionary extermination, leading one to also remember or envision cellars as the horrifying haven of Jews from the street where the Gestapo motored their rein of terror in the form of human collection wagons. Trembling under sweaty brow individuals and entire families waited for sirens to cease and the soft rap at the cellar door indicating they could once again move into the light of day, at least for a while. The kind of nervousness you've had to experience in order to comprehend. The German history that pressed in upon the street pressed in upon the cellar in different ways, for there was no element of "glorious" collective eruption to balance the threatened feeling that sent one fleeing off the streets initially or the paralyzing fear that kept one underground. Germany's position on the edge of the iron curtain in the age of nuclear doom certainly bared in on the cellar that already had the memories of World War II bombings characterizing it as a cement bunker – protection from the external world, but also the end of the line, no way out, at times a dead end. Beuys choice to activate the cellar with the events of *Vacuum—Mass* could not shake the memories of the past or diffuse the power of contemporary images that transmitted the singed and peeling skin of victims of Hiroshima or Vietnam into living rooms. In the space of the cellar, the creative playful humor of *La Fete* could not breath, suffocated underground like being buried alive.

While the slogan "anything goes" did not ring loudly or clearly, deadened by the cement insulation, the presentation of *Vacuum—Mass* in the particular space of the cellar might also be perceived as an alternate project of spatial reappropriation, the important element of revolution noted by Lefebvre. Given that the space had become at once a mne-

monic and foreboding bastion of inquisitional fear and apocalyptic doom, would not one strategy of transformation and reclamation be to feed off these associations, and then after intensive mastication to regurgitate them in reworked form, to recharge the entire space with new spirits through alternative spatial use? Marcuse had said of the new sensibility that it was a demand for a new morality and culture. As actions in the street revealed, the anti-authoritarian youth conceived of this renewal in upheaval and chaos. Beuys may have had the same goal of renewal in mind, but the tactic was different, and the success of this tactic depended on a simultaneity of convergence with and distinction from the space of the street.

At a time when many more West Germans were afraid of having the street redefined as a space of revolution, than were in the street eagerly attempting such redefinition, Beuys intended the space of the cellar to be an in-between space. This was perceivable from the start as the stairway became a threshold between the normative space of artistic display and the cellar, and potentially between art with normative

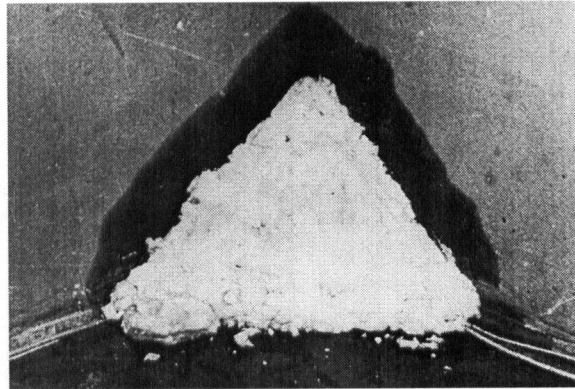


Figure 16. Fat corner oozing

aesthetic and/or logistic parameters and art with unusual qualities. The framing alerts the viewer to the performance's deliberateness, indicating that it is not only different, but it is important!⁵⁶ Framing is also the first step of ritual preparation, and this was the sense that Beuys wanted his performance to evoke from the start. The creation of the fat corner was signification of spatial marking, as the ritual space must be marked as sacred ground (fig. 16). As the substance oozed a residue into the walls and floor, the stain seemed to indicate that the spatial distinction was not just superficial but deeper in meaning. The reality of this was intensified through the potentiality for olfactory marking. Mixing with the inherent mustiness, the odor of fat created an overwhelming presence, unalleviated by a fresh window breeze or proper mechanized ventilation, to draw individuals by the nose and then hold them captive in the subterranean denizen. Scent worked conjunctively with the signification of the stairs as spatial threshold, at once "the only escape route" from the stench and "assurance of distinction" if the odor proved to tantalize. Unable to control the mnemonic power of scent, did Beuys' use of fat from the beginning perhaps allow into the space more fracture of past and present than he realized? Hans Magnus Enzensberger allowed that the smell of margarine became conflated with the bodies of poor people forced to walk the sharply defined class lines of the 20s, 30s and 40s (and one might add in the post war era of rationing). He continues, however, that during this period misery did not abate as the odor of margarine gave way to the wafting perfume of the bourgeoisie.⁵⁷

The smell became metonymic not just of the poor, but of the misery of Weimar as a whole, thereby reminding us of the mnemonic power of scent to trigger both pleasurable and horrific experiences. The slipperiness of fat certainly offered the possibility of both in the post war years. Corresponding to the physical immediacy of the cellar, through the film Eurasian staff, viewers were familiarized with another specially distinguished space. The erection of the four directional posts created a cubic space that determined the activities, and into which no one but Beuys was allowed. Intentional meaning prescribed that not just the cellar, but the space of each of his *aktionen* should be perceived as precisely created to important consequence. Social Sculpture was happening before their eyes, but it could also happen elsewhere.

Beuys utilized framing to signify a sense of order at the start, allowing his viewers a sense of grounding unlike the activities in the street that erupted spontaneously from no where in particular. Beuys' *aktion* framing was intended to control such spontaneity and chance eruption, for if he was to build a sense of community and commitment in the cellar, there could be no such interruptions. He had scored the event in advance, and although the encapsulatedness of the cellar was not a guarantee, it bought a certain amount of insurance that it would run its course as intended.

With the initial delimitation of space, Beuys distinctions went beyond internal/subterranean (cellar) and external/above ground (street) to include a host of related binary dichotomies: sacred and profane, special and routine, transcendent ideals and concrete realities, safety and danger.

For [spiritual] man, space is not homogenous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others....There is, then, a sacred space, and hence a strong, significant space; there are other spaces that are not sacred and so are without structure or consistency, amorphous. Nor is this all. For [spiritual] man, this spatial non-homogeneity finds expression in the experience of an opposition between space that is sacred—the only real and really existing space—and all other space, the formless expanse surrounding it.⁵⁸

This simple binary conceptualization of sacred (homogenous) and profane (fractured) space was essential for the efficacy of his *aktion* as ritual. The heterogeneity of the street embodied these relationships in a complex constantly shifting dynamic, Beuys intended to avoid such unpredictability. The underground chamber itself has a long history of religious significance in legend and myth, where it represents an initiatory ritual. Often descending underground means to undergo "initiatory death" the experience of which can establish a new mode of being. Myths often tell of humans being led underground by spiritual guides.⁵⁹ In this light, we can again return to the notion of the cellar as a space of alternative and potentially transforming experience. It once again seems a descent into the unknown, and further contextualization of the role of art at the time tends to lend greater potentiality to this perception.

It is significant to understand, that in 1968 the role art was to play in the schema of revolution was by no means straightforward. As the anti-authoritarian phase of the extra-parliamentary opposition movement waned, attentions shifted toward a development of socialist perspectives that went beyond "protest against the system" and the "great refusal" (slogans that had previously led the rallies and marches).⁶⁰ In relation to this shift came a corollary change of perspective regarding the potency of art, a change with which Beuys' strategy seemed to fit. The theorist that students rediscovered was Walter Benjamin. Previously less interested in his texts than those of Marcuse, around 1968 Benjamin's ideas set forth in the 1930s offered an alternative to the theories of both Theodore Adorno and Marcuse that were based on a notion of manipulation. If certain students turned to the goal of getting beyond the "Great Refusal", they could not conceive of beginning from a strategy of 'out manipulating the manipulators', of admitting weakness or worse defeat before the fight even began. Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" as well as "The Author as Producer" became particularly influential. Here Benjamin had attempted to formulate an idea of the revolutionary potential in art out of the production relations of capitalism. He worked to theorize a rapprochement between aesthetic quality and political correctness in the work of art, coming from a Marxist and vehemently anti-fascist position (Benjamin had fled from the Nazis in 1940). Benjamin perceived the productive forces to be in the artist himself, with the artist reconceptualized as a producer more akin to the proletariat, and in the artistic technique, especially the reproduction techniques used in the medias of film and photography. The primacy of revolutionary movement was always at the foundation. This Marcuse believed as well, but there was an important distinction: "While Marcuse believes that the function of art will change *after* the social revolution, Benjamin sees change developing out of modern reproduction techniques, which drastically affect the inner structure of art."⁶¹ Perhaps conceivably more utopic than Marcuse, Benjamin's theory allowed art an active role in bringing about the revolution as long as two requirements were met: one, the application of modern artistic techniques and two, partisanship and active participation of the artist in the class struggle.⁶² Thus, Benjamin could lend critical praise to the photomontage of John Heartfield as well as the efforts of the Dadaists. In the late 1960s, when the techniques of photography and montage had outworn their novelty, Beuys' engagement in the language of conceptualism (through his theory of Social sculpture) and minimalism (at least materially through his use of fat, felt iron) could be perceived as a use of "new modern artistic techniques", perhaps not in the same way as Benjamin saw reproducibility as liberating, but more in terms of the importance of medium in transmitting a message. This is the sense that Benjamin Buchloh conveys as he recalled the belief in the possible at the time of the late 1960s in Germany:

The period from 1968...was one of great optimism, during which conceptual art was associated rightly or wrongly, with the possibility of a radical transformative critique....It was a naïve reactualization of Walter Benjamin's essay on mechanical reproduction, whose impact had been extraordinary. For a few years some of us in Germany optimistically believed that certain forms of contemporary art could transform social thinking.⁶³

Due to technological developments and the increased pace of production, consumption and communication they engendered in Western capitalist economies by the late 1960s, such line of thinking was even more idealistic than when Benjamin had considered it thirty years earlier. Nevertheless Beuys was certainly one who worked towards its realization, staking, if not making, his name on the presumption that not just the work of art, but that he as artist (retrieving the aura that Benjamin himself had deemed shattered) could activate change.

Crucial to an understanding of the potential power of Beuys' work in this moment is also the multiplication of revolutionary models. We have noted that propagating an ideology or aligning oneself with a left or right of center ideology was a specious act under the integrationist-minded government of the Federal Republic. Yet, despite the 1956 banning of a parliamentary Communist party, and the subsequent taboo appeal of its manifesto for student groups as alternative to a bourgeois socialist compromise, revolution was not of an exclusively Communist vein. "There were alternative projects, more open than the heavy Marxist-Leninist model that functioned until then. 1967 saw the beginnings of a crisis in the productivist model and the idea of progress conceived as continual growth....This crisis of the productivist model generated a broad range of social alternatives seeking emancipation, primarily through the model of minority identities; but of course, the Marxist model...remained operative as well. The minority movements were inspired, to varying degrees, by this Marxist model."⁶⁴ Beuys realized the importance the discourse of Marxist socialism and revisionist strategies to political intervention at the time. Yet, rather than embracing this trend he maneuvered around it. He steered clear of easily targeted and controversial Marxian language, while acknowledging his own relation to it as he engaged in revolutionary discourse.

Transformation of the self must first take place in the potential of thought and mind. After this deep-rooted change, evolution can take place. There is no other possibility in my understanding, and this was perhaps too little considered by Marx, for instance. The idea of revolution coming from outer conditions, in the industrial field or the so-called reality of economic conditions can never lead to a revolutionary step unless the transformation of soul, mind and will power has taken place.⁶⁵

Thus, the issue of revolution in relation to art was not just about whether a particular type of art could generate revolution, but in relation to this, whether the instigation came from within or without. Whether the individual psyche transformed the order

of social existence or whether the existing order was overturned leading to an altered individual and social consciousness. In its adoption of the former strategy, Beuys' work became based on a need to stir the individual conscience of those who witnessed his *aktion*. It had to provoke alternative ways of thinking, had to present visual and experiential alternatives, so individuals could begin to conceptualize everyday life as different. Through a process of presence and extension the space of the cellar was to be felt as part of the whole revolutionary experience.

ACTION ART

Beuys' claimed that, compared to all of his preceding *aktionen*, *Vacuum—Mass* generated the closest relationship between action and sculpture and thus perhaps the best realization of his theory of Social Sculpture. This was due primarily to two aspects of the event. First, that each stage was purportedly determined by the making of the object, the welding and filling of the iron chest. Secondly, that the presence of the audience as well as the film footage revealing another "sculptural action" allowed for the extension of the traditionally isolated sculptural process into the wider social space. Beuys conducted the sculptural process in front of an audience, relinquishing it from its traditional confines in the artist's studio. If members of the New York School of Abstract Expressionism had brought the audience into the studio via photographs and documentary films, because the process was the art, Beuys brought the studio to the audience.⁶⁶ Caroline Jones addresses this issue in her book *The Machine in the Studio*, in which she mentions Beuys as one of several European artists viewing the studio as anachronistic to artistic production in the late 1960s. The French artist Daniel Buren, for example stated: "The art of yesterday and today is not only marked by the studio as an essential, often unique place of production; it proceeds from it. All my work proceeds from its extinction."⁶⁷ Buren, and to add another name often compared with Beuys, Yves Klein, had extremely different notions from each other and from Beuys as to how the artist should proceed from the studio.

According to Jones, it was the struggle to challenge the economic miracle of West Germany that forced Beuys' actions out of the studio. Given that her project is not a specific analysis of Beuys' work, Jones does not take the time and care to read against the grain as she does throughout the rest of her book. It is not that her reading of Beuys' performance is incorrect, rather it is spot on what Beuys intended one to interpret. Jones also claims that Beuys not only consistently challenged the primacy of the studio, but also the primacy of the object to which it had always been linked. Again, spot on according to Beuys rhetoric. These comfortably fitting readings leaves one feeling uneasy, however, when re-examined in light of more specific contextualization and further questioning such as: if we accept that Beuys' agenda was in part to engage the same discourses as other artists at the time – the efficacy of the art work to challenge the capitalistic process of commodification and the pre-eminence of the object as the work of art – in what ways did his particular realization of the work beyond the studio conflict with the projects of

others, and reveal a more complex relation to the discourses that Jones' readings elide.

For instance, the move also reflected the need to salvage the medium of sculpture itself, given the importance of the contemporary discourse of the medium as message. Trained as a sculptor, Beuys was not willing to abdicate its aesthetic (or political) worth, but as we have seen, he realized it had become too limited by conventional standards. We can add to this, however, the particular German difficulty of contending with past models, and more importantly refuting them if he was to be successful in his attempts at redefinition. If it was not the images of Nazi street spectacles that were the most ghastly specters of Hitler's Ministry of Culture, it was the sculpture of Arno Breker. The quintessential classical ideals and form of the human body had once again found a perverse vitality in his monolithic tributes to the 'supremacy' of the German race. In the face of Breker's marbleized 'German gods,' one might suggest a modeling after Alberto Giacometti's mere traces of human existence in bronze as necessary corrective. In the post war years, however, most West Germans would hardly have accepted an art that only painfully drove home the inherent fragility of life, calling up its most tragic inscription in the emaciated bodies of concentration camp victims. It seemed that the only viable way to represent the body sculpturally (or anything else, given that Breker's non-human depictions were no less totalitarian) was to present the sculpting body itself directly to the people, at once alive and productive. As an individual Beuys could challenge the authority of the Breker stereotype or Giacometti's stylization. However, the fact that within his *aktion* he avoided the problematics associated with these earlier studio-based forms, did not mean he necessarily avoided representation of a particular body type that was also problematic. As we examine the symbolic use of his body in the following section, it shall become clear that his choice of 'body type' was perhaps more significant to the diametric oppositionality of the two models than we might yet suppose. Was the disparity of signification between a Breker and a Giacometti, as contextualized within post war West Germany, yet another 'in-between' Beuys attempted to maneuver?

Related to the issue of the human subject, and also integral to the move beyond the studio, was a distinctive West German desire in 1968 to challenge the dominance of certain forms of contemporary international art, specifically forms imported from America. The fact that as late as 1967 a West German art critic writing for a major international arts magazine could "get away with": publishing positivist claims that "new art" in the *Bundesrepublik* was indebted to Informalism, proceed to describe canvas after canvas a variation of abstraction while simultaneously announcing the "huge successes" these works enjoyed in the galleries, and then relegate the significance of happenings and action art to a five word sentence fragment at the end of the article, reveals the fact that those avant-gardes who had either never taken up imported abstraction or tired of it back in the fifties, including Beuys, still had a steep climb in order to "get over Informel."⁶⁸ Of course, West Germany was not alone in its demand for the "international language" of abstraction in the post war years, but the resiliency of it within West German culture was alternatively

complex due to its interweaving with issues of individual and collective identity in ways that it did not in other countries. This entanglement was as ideological and political as it was formal.⁶⁹ Therefore in order to reject it fully, artists had to at least potentially offer more than just a different aesthetic veneer, they had to come out fighting with an equally, if not more exciting rhetoric to match. Was Beuys' Social Sculpture up for the battle?

Teetering on the edge between Communism and capitalistic democracy, West Germany was a crucial target for the facet of American Cold War foreign cultural policy that propagated Abstract Expressionism (especially the work of the New York School) as Freedom. As Yule Heibel stated, "In the United States, the arts successfully served as a building block of liberalism and of the middle class, and Constable [an American made the director of Office of Military for Germany United States – Education and Cultural Relations Division (OMGUS-ECR) wanted to see art play a similar role in Germany."⁷⁰ This it could do fairly easily, as Germans, in turn, were eager to study foreign models that would offer alternatives to massification and totalitarianism. For many West German artists the energy of Abstract Expressionist painting, and the development of Tachism and Informel was exciting in that it opened a dimension that constituted a new beginning.⁷¹ These forms embodied an opportunity for Germany's national art production to catch up in the international modernist race re-entered in the 1950s after being sidelined by Hitler's the classicizing domination of the arts during the Third Reich.

Beuys was aware of the colonizing power of Abstract Expressionism, but also of the hostility towards it shared most vocally by artists and intellectuals who felt its cultural stranglehold. Anti-authoritarian youth, in their demand to be treated as subjects and not objects of history tempered by a demand for collective action, correlatively demanded an art that spoke to these desires. Beuys tacitly joined a collective fight against abstract painting, and its association with American didacticism on "individualism versus collectivism, and pragmatism versus impracticality."⁷² Performative art in its increased inclusion of the viewer in the aesthetic experience, such as Fluxus was attempting through its "blurring of art and life," could play in the interstices of these demands, between objectivity and subjectivity, between the individual and the collective. This was what made the move beyond the studio potentially so exciting. Although we realize that post-studio production must be investigated on a case by case and relational basis, Amelia Jones describes the importance of the general phenomena of relocation: "Through embodied performances, the performers ostensibly removed the mediating factors of art market and interpretive structure: the body as "pure index," it seemed, could purvey the artist's intentional meanings *directly* to the viewer, who became a participant in the performance rather than a passive observer to be instructed by the modernist critic."⁷³ To this we can offer a West German addendum that performance, in its direct exchange between embodied subjectivities, became a means to bypass American ideology as mediated through Abstract Expressionism. In the performative ideal, West German viewers would play a greater role in determining their own subjective identity, as opposed to an art form that had taken

on the impositional force of a predetermined, and not to forget integrationist-minded, cultural identity.

Performances of course varied as to the degree they engaged in the concrete problems of identity politics facing the Federal Republic. Fluxus, as Dada had before them, took up the everyday as the commonality that would dissolve the hierarchical nature of artistic reception privileging the individual artist as bestowed with special gifts (for which Jackson Pollock had become the standard bearer) and to emphasize the seemingly irrational as aesthetic adventure. Interested in the mechanisms of "subjecthood" formation, Fluxus as an international compendium was less inclined to experiment in terms agitated by national borders. It would seem this factored into Beuys' decision to extricate himself from the group. He claimed Fluxus was not focussed enough, not suitably directed in its theory or practice. This "looseness" was of course in part the point of Fluxus, but Beuys had a definite agenda, which he perceived better practiced as a singular "German contingent." As point of distinction from Fluxus in general, but also more specifically as it contributed to the fracturing of the "anti-abstract painting front," Beuys tugged at alternate strains of the post war propaganda surrounding abstraction that he perceived had out worn their welcome. In severing his own work in this way, he was able to give his work a particular German flair not present in Fluxus, but he also once again gave cause to question his own positioning within the individual – collective interplay.

Abstraction, as ushered in by American cultural attaches, was a particularly powerful tool within West Germany's climate of integration due to its seeming ability to absorb strife, conflict and fracture into its geometries and splatters. It was the "perfect art" to enable West Germany to de-realize its past, yet it was the same characteristics that provoked West German cultural critics to easily link the style to their general disdain of the whole of the popular culture bred by American capitalism. In its false optimism, this form of culture seemed simplistic and naïve, and worst of all it "represses reality – namely, awareness of pain – and therefore results in neurotic compulsive behavior."⁷⁴ The problem faced in the early post war years, when Germans could not claim a neurosis on the part of American culture with their own seemingly in the eternal sick bed, was eased once West Germany stood on stable democratic ground, and Beuys perceived an opportunity to reintroduce those things previously avoided, as either too revealing of the harshness of everyday life in post war society or too dangerously close to the exploitations of Nazism. If Abstract Expressionism was in a sense visual representation of the consumer culture Marcuse had diagnosed with a malaise of "unhappy consciousness," then Beuys in his active manipulation of objects and body would intervene with a new language that challenged the viewer to actively participate in the reading of an art that prided itself on the divisive state of contemporary society, and a complexity that disavowed any one-word explication in the way abstraction had been conflated to stand for "freedom" in the 1950s. The opening of his work to discourses seemingly elided in American cultural production and its German derivatives, however, introduced alternate problematics. It remains to be

examined how the potentially conflictual aims of democratization (as the confidence in Abstract Expressionism's ability to do so waned) and complexification played out towards a proposed end of slipping easily into Abstract Expressionisms' shoes as a new aesthetic language of freedom.

Yet it was not just the authority of Abstract Expressionism that had to be superseded by socially conscious German artists. By mid-decade, the United States sent in a reinforcement battalion, code name Pop, that was able to completely redefine the terms of cultural liberation. Upon reception, Pop had immediately become a rage, especially among many young Germans who saw in the art, as well as the music and fashion that came with it, a sense of freedom, playfulness and rebellion. It came to stand for a new form of American freedom, different from that received through Abstract Expression, for Pop was even more colorful, bold and youthful. When Pop arrived there was still a large contingent of the population looking for things not German. Pop breathed in a fresh spirit, especially across dusty classroom schoolbooks. As Andreas Huyssen recalls in his essay "The Cultural Politics of Pop" regarding his and others' perceptions of Pop at the Documenta of 1968:

I, like many others, believed that Pop art could be the beginning of a far reaching democratization of art and art appreciation. This reaction was as spontaneous as it was false. Right or wrong notwithstanding, the very real feeling of liberation which many art spectators experienced at that time was more important.⁷⁵

Given this, however, Huyssen also acknowledges that the tide of reception for Pop also changed in 1968. The honeymoon was over, and things became more complex as the anti-authoritarian student movement heated up. Full of antagonism towards the United States for its militant presence in West Germany and its involvement in Vietnam, American Pop was now clearly perceived by many as no more than it ever was—an affirmation of the same mass consumer culture that critics had despised in its infiltrative form of abstraction and now despised even more through its exacerbated form of Pop. At best ironic, it glorified the oppressive capitalistic relations of production, the German youth were fighting against. Thus, while some were enjoying the sensual and exciting appeal of Pop, for others it was an aspect of Documenta IV to protest, yelling burn the American Pop! Was the tide not only waning for Pop, was it beginning to wax for new things German? Well, perhaps yes, and perhaps no. American Pop was still red "hot" for collectors, and thus they were not saying burn it, but buy it!

Yet even if prospects were uncertain, Beuys was willing to take the chance that 1968 could represent such a crucial moment in West German history, that a space had opened up (for which a few years prior there was not even a visible door) in which a sense of "Germanness" could be re-cultivated. In attempting this, however, he faced a peculiar predicament. Beginning with the post war internal discourses on authenticity by which

the West abdicated all responsibility for certain cultural traditions in condemnation of the East, thereby creating a void in their own heritage, and then exacerbated as the gape was for most people surfaced over by the surrogate likes of Abstract Expressionism and Pop, a cultural-political environment was created by the late 1960s, in which "Germanness" had in a sense become "Other" within its own context of production. Arguments could go as far as describing West Germany as a culturally colonized nation in which measures of assimilation had been extremely successful. Educators were not informing children properly of the facts about Hitler, and due to its forced complicity in the rhetoric of the "master race," Romanticism and its ideals were also not touted even from length of a ten foot poll. (Recall that Romanticism was described as only of the East, and therefore falsely German.) After more than twenty years of internally and externally managed effacement, the "Other", as the Modernist notation for difference that spurred projects of appropriation in a search for exoticness and a perceived potentiality of liberation and pleasure, seemed to pertain to Germany's own traditions. Beuys observed that as demands for alternatives and for transformation surged within the young generation, he perhaps need not travel abroad or turn to a marginalized indigenous ethnic group for inspiration, the conventional sources of "Otherness." Traditional "Germanness", especially in the form of *volksische* myth that had been so powerful during the period of Beuys own youth and teenage years, had itself become an underground culture, and as tenuous as the connection was at the time, the mythic notion of the German held certain characteristics that converged with the desires of youth. Could one de-Nazify the concept of the *Volk* (and all the political, religious, cultural and social impulses associated with it) in order to de-Americanize the Federal Republic? Could the traditions be reconfigured for contemporary society? Was it possible that in an ironic contradiction, tradition had been repressed by the majority of the population long enough that it could in a sense be excavated from the underground and reintroduced in a strange simultaneity of exotic self-representation? And more crucially, yet questionably, could it bring with it a sense of liberation and pleasure?

Rather than unearthing from above, Beuys entered the underground directly, intending that what he and his viewers "found" in the cellar would be a re-spirited sense of "Germanness." As he was implicated in the devastated past along with other Germans of his generation, it was Beuys' intention that the traditions should be salvaged in their lifetime. In this way, their constant and continual burial, covered over by shovel-full after shovel-full of silence and criticism, might cease before those who directly understood the reasons behind it were gone and unable to benefit from a resurrection. It is true that "Germanness" had been an element of Beuys' work from the beginning, but it was not until the late 1960s that Beuys had a young audience attempting to rile a whole society over issues such as the repression of the past, the need to overcome the shame tied to being German that it seemed they were supposed to feel, and the demand to assert the individual as a subject of history in the making.

Thus, while as previously noted, Beuys brought the studio out in front of an audience through action, he did not leave the romance behind. Wanting the best of both a private and public world of the artist, the romance of the isolated studio traveled with him, but reconceptualized in terms of a shared experience in a public space. Here Beuys would specifically redress and recharge the *volkische* myth of what it meant to be German, and in particular to re-present what constituted the culturally superior mystic German artist. Beuys' *aktion* was a tracing of contemporary aesthetic practice back to traditions tied to the "natural" German, or *Ur-Volk*, which he saw as a powerful means to heal a nation to its roots. Within German cultural tradition, identity is integrally tied to the land, a connection which of course had been brutally exploited in Nazi rhetoric. Beuys attempted to reclaim the freedom to speak of the "soil" through the notion of "Eurasia," a utopian pacific merger of East and West (across which Germanic people's animal kin of hare and stag once roamed) as opposed to a unification through militaristic conquest (such as Hitler's regime had intended by invading Russia). As he trembled like one possessed by an supra-human force, or as he moaned and uttered, "o-o' and 'Bildkopf-Bewegkopf-Der bewegte Isolator'," or as he raised the gauze to his head as if experiencing a vision, Beuys placed himself in historical continuity with the mystic-minded *Ur-volk*. Via land and via the people, such redefined identifications with the mythic past were in hopes that a new form could diffuse the haunting force of its previously most recent appropriation.

That Beuys liked to play the mystic shaman is by now well known, and indeed, many people did and continue to appreciate, if not wholeheartedly believe in, his "superior" mystic qualities. With this in mind, it is perhaps more interesting to ask whether there was something potentially in the offering for those who disbelieved the shamanistic show? In his self-perpetuation of favored characteristics of the German, Beuys simultaneously conjured ideas that the youth perceived devastated in their own existence. As certain nationalistically minded Art Historians in the 1920s and 1930s had described the virtues of the "natural" German in relation to aesthetic production and reception:

For the Germans, some trace of willfulness, some trace of broken rules, must always remain if they are to believe in the freedom of existence.... We cannot consider it a deficiency that the North has never adhered strictly to rules and frequently even treated them lightly; rather, this expresses a distinct and positive basic attitude indicative of the entire German relationship to nature. Germans do not believe in the absolute value of rules but perceive a streak of irrationality in all living things. This feeling for an irrationality that simply cannot be expressed in stable forms already conditions the style of the German primitives.⁷⁶

First devastated by the exploitation of Hitler, and then denied by the onslaught of technological rationality, we have previously discussed how the force of the individual found re-signification in Beuys' work, but even more specifically, the German individual found strength of identity as well, with himself playing the "representative German." The

importance of engaging in this discourse at the time was indicated by its visibility even in the canvases of the "new" abstractionists, as they too addressed the critique of abstraction as dehumanizing and attempted to give individuality greater consideration through "poetic image-invention".⁷⁷ The problem with their efforts, however, was that in 1968, the medium of painting itself was not where the action was at. The problem with Beuys' work was relatively more serious as it ran head on into the cultural danger zones.

Any attempt to maintain a historical continuity with Romanticism after Nazism was extremely problematic, even if the proclaimed intention was the mounting of tradition as a form of liberation from taboo. The discourse that described the Western zones of occupation as Allied, but particularly American colonies, allows an appropriation of postcolonial theory as inroad to a better understanding of the problematic of Beuys' work. As Homi K. Bhabha related, "...the productive ambivalence of the colonial object of discourse – that "otherness" which is at once an object of desire and derision," is always implicated in the economy of domination and power.⁷⁸ To reassert "Germanness" was to challenge the domination of the United States, but also to stir public sentiments on "desire and derision" for one's self as a German. Beuys would attend to this fact that the "colonization" was as much about inner psychological mechanisms as external socio-political ones. This is not to fall into the trap of collective guilt by which every German individual was suffering from a sense of psychological fracture, but rather to reassert the fact that the passage of over two decades without active public work on grieving or commemoration impacted the way Germans could perceive themselves in relation to their national tradition. This extended also to youth who subject to the silences and gaps of their elders, "exercised a sort of sublime repression of the past."⁷⁹ For some West Germans in 1968, the derision towards tradition and the past was tantamount to a conclusion that the duration of repression could never be long enough to warrant a resuscitation. In contrast, many students, believed that in terms of discussions and debates, "no more taboos" was the only slogan by which to herald a less oppressive future. Yet, importantly, youths were not necessarily looking for the traditions themselves to be re-authorized and reinstated. For as much as it was a period of questioning the repression of the past, it was a questioning prompted by a belief that a latent continuity of fascism gone unaccounted for had granted license for it to regain prominent forum in the Establishment. It was a moment of fine-lines, and in the case of Beuys he performed on a tight rope with certain audience members rightfully prepared to scrutinize his *aktion* beyond the studio at every aesthetic turn.

Undeniably, however, a tight rope walk is exciting, and if Beuys' procession into action beyond the studio held this excitement within the West German gallery scene, it was perhaps even more exciting for the students, that Beuys was allowing challenge to convention to inform his pedagogy. Beuys was not only breaking out of the studio himself, he was encouraging his students at the Düsseldorf Academy to avoid fixation on place when it came to producing their own work. In this way he seemed to aid in the

overturning of the dusty academic workbenches and drafting tables, which had been the initial impetus for the student movement. Thus, again the space of action becomes of prime importance. Universities were extremely limited in the degree to which they contributed to the raising of everyday consciousness through a public reckoning with the past. The German educational tradition was perceived as one of few possible pillars of virtue that could be resurrected from the ashes of National Socialism, and thus to be preserved at all cost was a conceptualization of the university as: "the mother of German scholarship, science, and industry and the *fons et origo* of that German world leadership in many humanistic and scientific disciplines that was undisputed from the mid-nineteenth century to 1933".⁸⁰ Thus, functioning largely in accordance with academic precepts of the 1920s if not earlier, and under the watchful eyes of Allied monitors, West German universities throughout the 1950s and early 1960s were not spaces in which information and critical speech flowed freely. As members of the German left perceived from the end of the War, without change, universities would remain operable only for a fortunate few, thus perpetuating an unequalitarian social structure at large, and also eclipsing the historical reality of the Third Reich inhibiting professors, students and German citizens on the whole from learning from the past so that the same mistakes were not repeated. This fear was not far-fetched considering the lack of knowledge on the part of most West German of what had come to be known vaguely and monolithically as "the recent past". 1959 classroom surveys revealed that nine out of ten students between the ages fourteen and seventeen responded when queried that they "knew nothing about Hitler or believed he had done more good than harm."⁸¹ And sadly it took the jolt of a violent wave of anti-Semitism spanning from Christmas Eve 1959 to January 28, 1960, and the outrage it stirred beyond German borders to incite significant changes in textbooks and teaching methods that would still not begin to take hold until mid-decade.

Beuys himself would jolt the academic system in clear attempts to maintain connections to the anti-authoritarians. Just how this manifest is seen most explicitly in his reaction to the 2 June 1967 shooting of Benno Ohnesorg. After the tragedy, when intellectuals such as Marcuse and Adorno specifically addressed the role of violence in the mounting crisis, and members of the SDS took to the streets, Joseph Beuys also seized a moment of opportunity. Perceiving an intense energy in the distress of students at the Düsseldorf Academy, Beuys claimed that under the proper guidance the energy could be directed towards change. The "direction" of energy allowed him to carefully carve a place for himself to be "the word". Rather than join in support of the already organized and intellectually sophisticated SDS, Beuys formed his own "German Student Party" among the students at the Academy whose devotion he had already won due to his unconventional teaching practices. As he stated, he would "be their mouthpiece; [because] very often they cannot correctly express what arouses their displeasure."⁸² Refusal of SDS affiliation, however, was also a refusal of direct connection to an existent network of student activists with energy nodes at all the major universities across the Republic. This despite the fact

that Beuys made intentional claims of “an offer to all German universities to present in a common initiative the problems of higher institutions of learning and to newly formulate the political awareness of the citizens of the country.”

Beuys claimed his party was for the concretization of political ideas, yet while the SDS members named and located specific entities within the German and global context (the Bundestag, Springer press, the Shah of Persia, the United States in the immediate form of Vice President Hubert Humphrey when he visited) with whom they initiated direct confrontation, Beuys in word and action maintained a distance. At his instigation, the “German Student Party” soon became “Fluxus Zone West”. Ironically, the group that Beuys purposely broke with some years earlier due to its lack of focused direction, would now be employed “in order to make clear that ‘Fluxus Zone West’ refers to the situation of western man, to the totality of western society which has shaped it.”⁸³ Even to the ‘Politically uninitiated’ such vague phraseology could not sound concrete, not like the thudding of bricks thrown by the SDS. But what of those who believed change should emerge by less destructive means or perhaps did not want change at all. As some responded to the student activists, “You young people, you want to destroy everything. But what’s going to become of us? What are we all going to do?” To which a student responded “Right, now it’s up to all of us. The new university concerns you too. You’re not going to sun yourself on the beach while your future is decided [in the university].”⁸⁴ The youths response was rational, and perhaps understood by the fearful antagonist, but did the student actions in the street visualize such rationality?

Beuys’ language and action offered an alternative to the blunt language and action causing chaos in the streets while still carrying the force of a call for change. One of Beuys’ greatest skills was the art of the vague, and as many historical models of leadership exemplify, less explicit revelation of intention and strategy often inspires more awesome support. (Of course, the thought of a leader wielding the tool of vagueness carried with it an eerie specter in 1968.) The consternation that Beuys’ rhetoric and Academic actions provoked was first heard collectively and loudly in 1968 through a mistrust manifesto ratified by nine of his colleagues.

The ratifying professors are of the opinion that the Academy of Art is facing a crisis that threatens its existence....Presumptuous, political diletantism, passion for ideological tutelage, demagogical practice—and in its wake intolerance, defamation, and uncollegial spirit aimed at the dissolution of the present order, have reached disturbingly into the fields of art and education. ...[there exists] a clearly documented determination against power and toward a potential loss of balance within the Academy.⁸⁵

In a sense, these words were music to radical students’ ears. They sat in Beuys’ classrooms full of fifty students rather than twenty tops like those of other professors, they heard Beuys call for reformation of entrance qualifications that would allow educational opportunities for more students, and they knew that in 1968 Beuys continued to

teach without pay due to the expiration of his contract with no renewal. The fact that conservative faculty were scared meant that efforts for change were making an impact. Just as the government had been forced to react to eruptions within society at large, the establishment of the Düsseldorf Academy was put on the alert.

Regarding the hostile manifesto, however, in many ways the characterization of him was apt. While he may have demonstrated determination against certain configurations of power and order, in other ways the preservation of these things was vital to the efficacy of his particularized role as artist of action. Thus, regarding the space of the university, we once again perceive Beuys sheathing his work in an institutionalized protective skin. It is true that his work was a conundrum stimulating goose bumps of excitement as well as an irritating rash, but not to the degree that the skin would peel away opening his classroom to the street. The Academy was a shelter from the stormy streets as the cellar was a bunker from the bombs, and as he held viewers "captive" in the underground, the enlarged enrollment in his classes was at once perhaps a step towards democratization of education and/or a full house for the show of an alternative order. Even with the extensive postwar measures to prevent extremism, by the late 1960s, the Federal Republic seemed to be dealing only in extremes. Making these extremes part of his vocabulary, Beuys offered a sense of order with a radical veneer. His *aktionen* belonged to the "path of the third ways" that had been provoking West Germans since the end of World War II.

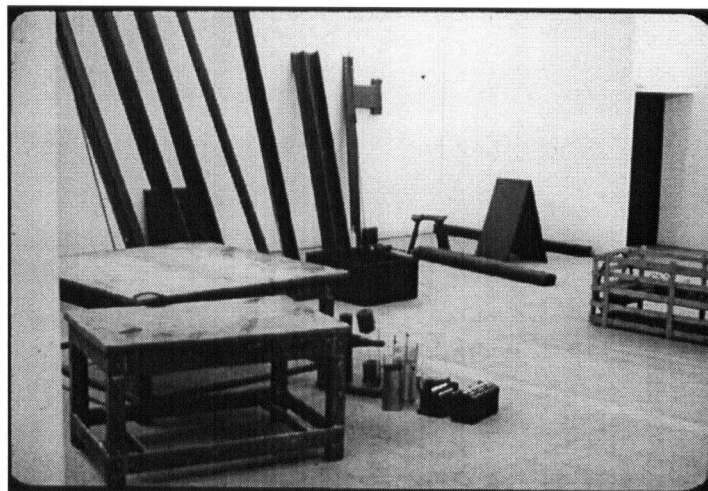
If Beuys' action beyond the studio was provocative when considered within the context of a "solo-exhibition" and the university, it must have really caused sparks to fly at a high profile event such as Documenta IV as it occurred along with Vacuum — Mass in 1968. While the nature of the sparks remain to be seen, the comparison to Vacuum — Mass is important for it affords insight into the reasons behind Beuys' breadth and diversity of reception. "Documenta is for Europe at least, the exhibition of the year."⁸⁶ Such was the tone of proclamation coming from critics who lauded the efforts of the curators in their pronounced aim "to survey the tendencies which have made up the progressive art scene of the past four years," but in the organizers terms, the "progressive" art did not include performance, and within West Germany the show became a microcosm of the extreme contention surrounding active art at the time. By 1968, Documenta was firmly on the map as the Federal Republic's contribution to the fashionable European art tour. West Germany had finally re-attained an aspect of cultural status lost for thirty plus years. Unfortunately for its organizers and sponsors and the government officials in attendance, however, the exhibition erupted with protest and performance shenanigans. It was clear from the start that as much as certain individuals wanted to create a demure and de-politicized realm for Documenta, the unexpected and spontaneous would encroach.

The objections hurled primarily by students and artists during the press conference, the opening ceremony, and at a public hearing in the municipal hall were of two main strains, although each strain clearly represented an overarching commitment to the fight against the unjust social system, namely capitalism. For the most radical, the event

should not be happening at all for the production and consumption of art should cease until the realization of the revolution. For others it was a matter of choice, and these individuals were furious that groups such as Fluxus, and happenings, and environments which ask for participation were completely absent. Others created an uproar over the lack of German representation. Among the more than one hundred and forty artists, only thirteen were German while fifty-eight were American! And not just the disruptive types like Wolf Vostell were uninvited, those considered more “reputable”, although perhaps disruptive in a less volatile way, such as Gerhard Richter were also left off the list. According to the activists informed by contemporary Marxist arguments (here one senses Marcuse’s influence), the art work selected for Documenta affirmatively reproduces the systematic relations of an unfree society—“castrative restrictions on communication inherent to the prevalence of the aggressive principles of exploitation, competition or status in-fighting, and moral repression.”⁸⁷

Beuys, however, was admitted into Documenta for the second time, having participated in 1964 as well. What about his own performance shenanigans? What about his disruptive brand of action? Why was his art admissible when other seemingly similar production was not? We considered the proposal set forth in Caroline Jones’ reading of Beuys’ work as a challenge to commodification and the primacy of the object, yet were aware that this should be re-examined. Beuys’ contribution to the 1968 Documenta was in a sense a “bourgeois compromise” (to recall the radical socialists’ critique of the Weimar government officials). His art allowed that he could do this because despite the fact that it was performance, valued in the late 1960s for its characteristics of restlessness and ephemerality in the face of status quo reification, he continued to produce objects. At once integral to the performance, they could also stand in memoria of the event in a subsequent static display. Such was the case at Documenta, for which Beuys could simply retreat from his storeroom, collect some action residue and set it in a room (fig. 17). Certainly, those viewing the art would be alerted that it had once been a part of an *aktion*, and despite Beuys’ claims that the objects carried inside them all the energy generated through the performance, what was perceivable to the Documenta viewers was the force of installation not activation. Beuys’ *Raumplastik* had audience along with the Pop and Conceptual art, thereby af-

Figure 17. *Raumplastik*, Documenta 1968



filiating him with internationally established figures such as Yves Klein, Robert Rauschenberg, Richard Hamilton, Claes Oldenburg, Warhol, etc. For this opportunity, Beuys made a conscious choice to abandon performative expression and let the static object translate his conceptual message, a choice that other artists experimenting in performance due to its ability to supersede the auratic authority of the object were continually refusing to make.

With the experience of Documenta under his belt, Beuys could command greater public attention as well as greater value in the eyes of certain art aficionados. His work was perceived more and more as not just worthy of consideration, but as a collectable asset. Beuys did not refute this perception, he indeed continued to make its realization all the more possible. Like other cultural critics, he derided the commodification of the art object and the negative effects of alienation and materialism that were by-product of a mass consumer culture, but in the next breath might say "I'll sell it to you for...". It was in 1968 that Beuys sold his entire collection of works to the cosmetics manufacturer Karl Stroher. Perhaps the most significant aspect of the contract was that from that point forward Beuys would sell each of his works to Stroher at cost. One might argue that this challenged the authority of the market place, for Beuys could have commandeered a much higher price had he left it up to market play. On the other hand, in signing with Stroher, Beuys had tied himself to the traditional patronage system, as if the cosmetics baron was his German Medici. In this way, the fetishization of the art object was far from questioned, it was exacerbated, for one capitalist would gather all while others coveted what they could not have.⁸⁸ Beuys had in a sense created a microcosm of what the German political terrorist Ulrike Meinhof, who rose to notoriety in the year 1968 for the bombing of a Frankfurt department store, meant when he spoke of *Konsumterror* – "the terrorism of consumption, the fear of not being able to get what is on the market, the agony of being the last in line..." the agony of being excluded from the start and not being able to participate in a desired part of social life.⁸⁹

Commodity fetishization was part and parcel of the critique of capitalism in which action artists engaged. Related to this was the issue of boredom, which the anti-authoritarian youth saw as a supremely modern phenomena, a modern form of control. It was related to an old revolutionary dream that had been nearly realized but in contemporary society had gone sour. It was related to a dream that Beuys sought to resurrect with his notion of every man an artist! "In a new world of unlimited pleasure each individual might construct a life, just as in the old world a few privileged artists had constructed their representations of what life could be." As mass media and new forms of entertainment made possible by the new technological advancements of "miracle" industries, entertainment began to take over West German's increasing leisure time, it seemed that people began doing less and watching more. Watching fictions of false freedom. Marcuse would speak of the generation of a "free" society based on false needs. The boredom had become an imperceptible constant for many who perceived a novelty in fashion or even a political

party as actual change instead of the mere variation it was. Although perhaps not conscious of it (or if conscious not sure how to remedy it), because it was false freedom, it was boredom breeding a malaise of passivity. "It was a leisure culture that produced boredom—produced it, marketed it, took the profits, reinvested them." A boredom so well managed it seemed impossible to stop its perpetuation. By 1967, however, West German youth and many artists were full of the anger and resentment born of the haze they perceived the majority of their society, but especially their elders, to be steeping in. Not having lived through the pain of the War and the Holocaust, it may have been difficult to see that hidden behind the glaze of their parents eyes were feelings of uncertainty, guilt and anguish. Their agenda became to provoke an entire society up out of television easy chairs to feel more tangibly the violence of everyday life, not second-hand through print media or the spectacle of electronic interface, but right in the street off their front porch. This was the motivation behind Kommun I's ironic mandate for arson in department stores to give the population "an authentic Vietnam feeling", implying that only if bombs struck the core of their daily life would West Germans be shocked out of laissez-faire attitudes.⁹⁰ It was the same motivation behind the German Destructioneer artist Werner Schreib's will to burn large photographs of Willy Brandt in 1966 in the streets of London after the SDS politician agreed to form the Grand Coalition.⁹¹ Gustav Metzger, an Austrian who worked with acid stated the Destructioneers' opinion on action in the late 1960s: "Auto-Destructive art as a comprehensive theory for action in the field of the plastic arts in the post World War II period. Action is not limited to a theory of art and the production of art works. It includes social action and is acutely concerned with advances and changes in society, science and technology during this century."⁹² For these artists drawing from Futurist models, and from Dada's nihilist delight in playful ruination, destruction was the only viable action, the only viable art form, in a world spinning with the heat of class warfare, colonial terror and nuclear doom.

As we have seen, Beuys had cloistered himself and his art off from the destruction in the street, but this did not sever the relation altogether, he slipped into the dialogue of destruction in his own way. As Kristine Stiles relates via anthropological methodologies:

The interstice between the object and subject is performance. ...[regarding] the difference between normal objects and 'works of effective presence,' it is the behavioral element that links the two. All societies attribute unique qualities to selected objects (stones, mounds, earth, etc.) because 'peoples' behavior toward them argues that they are something more....Behavioral evidence as a criterion of classification helps us more markedly in our attempts to fit such phenomena into the schemes of human existence...⁹³

Bicycle air pumps became missile launchers with fat as their projectiles. The fat splattered like bodily matter, and the pumps, finished with the dirty work of wrecking havoc, also tossed away, conjointly became visual signifier of the consequence of chaos.

Even photographs of the aftermath emanate a sense of explosive destruction. Visible are the dismembered parts of the pumps, and chunks of fat bleeding into the room's surfaces oily stains like bodily excretion. Other bits of fat are left smeared in all directions, accidentally stepped on in the heat of action (fig. 19). Through the active manipulation of an essential material such as fat, and an innocuous object such as a bicycle air pump, Beuys created an environment of non-destructive destruction. Beuys always insisted on using the commercial product Asta (a brand of German margarine) for his *aktionen*, and the choice of a substance that was at once consumer good and part of human biological composition allowed for an impressive yet non-threatening metaphorical association to bodily destruction (fig. 18).



Figure 18. Beuys unpacks the fat

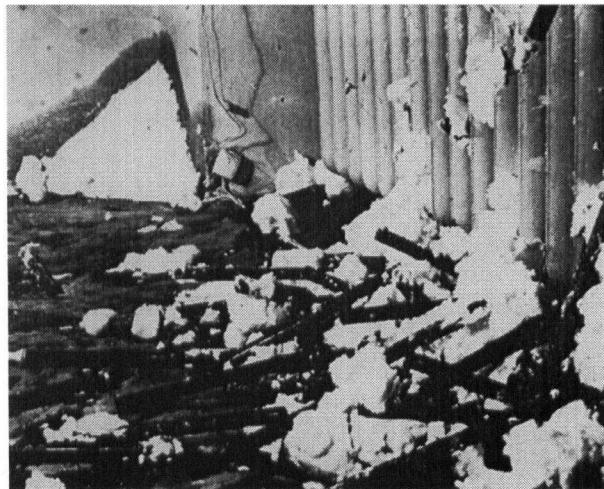


Figure 19. Fat corner and splatter field

If youth in the street conceived of form in the chaotic and lived expression of La Fete, Beuys in the cellar constructed his action on the same chaos to form dialectic. "Fat

was the ideal material for demonstrating the Theory, since it can exist as a physical example of both extremes, as a chaotic, formless and flowing liquid when warm, and as a defined and ordered solid when cold." While the fat projectiles splattered, the fat corner sat composed and ordered. For Beuys, the corner signified the most "mechanistic tendency of the human mind, the corner stone of our present society, as manifested in our square rooms, square buildings and square cities, all built on combinations of right angles..." and by placing a potentially chaotic substance such as fat in the corner the mechanization and crystallization are challenged. As the fat corner began to ooze the rigidity of the corner was refused. This reasoning behind the use of fat is corollary to his socialist view as a whole, which refuted any ideology of mechanized socialism and drew instead from eighteenth and nineteenth century texts that described society as an organic body. In this way Beuys drew favor with students opposing affiliation with conventional party ideologies. Socialism modeled on life in a bee colony was certainly more open and expressive, than the regulated Communist marches for Stalin or the rubber stamping of laws by the SDS in the Bundestag.

Yet despite the *Vacuum—Mass*'s dynamic interplay of order and chaos calling up the street and the uncertainty associated with social transformation, the fact remained that in Beuys' world, order always won out. This fact attenuated the bridge Beuys' attempted to construct between street and cellar, causing a few more cracks to appear through its surface. For as had been the case for Dadaists in the early decades of the century, order reigned as boredom for the disaffected youth in the street.

SYMBOLIC LANGUAGE

The predominance of order did not, however, render Beuys' propagation of social transformation obsolete, far from it. For as we beam in more closely on the type of order *Vacuum—Mass* embodied, alternate discourses crucial to the well-being of the social body of Federal Republic and liberation of the individual within it are revealed. Order reins with boredom, boredom being the 'always there', the routine, the predictable. Order in *Vacuum—Mass*, however, took the form of ritual, and this potentially stands in contrast to the everyday and to routine and even perhaps boredom. The central event of the *aktion* was the welding of the iron half-cross chest. Although the flames were small in comparison to those that mangled the vans of the Springer Press, they were large enough to convey the sense that Beuys was utilizing a potentially destructive force in a creative act. Not only this, but that which was constructed was a symbol of tradition in the Christian religion. Creation rather than destruction and tradition rather than anarchy, was Beuys betraying the process of change? The first thing one notices, however, in attempting to answer this question is that the cross was in half. Perhaps Beuys had a message at once informed by yet different from tradition? And if so how did this agenda relate to the perception that so much that seemed novel in the consumer society of 1968 was but a variation and not a real change?

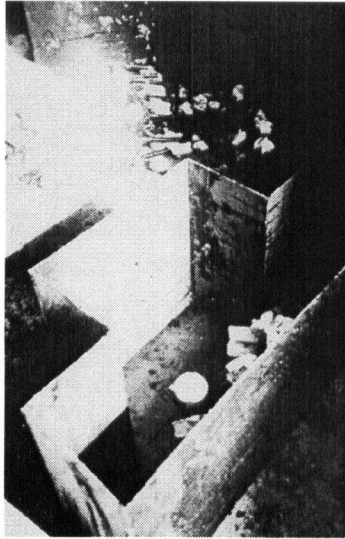


Figure 20. Open half-cross chest

One of the aspects particular to German society in the late 1960s, was the need to heal. The cross was immediately familiar to audience members, allowing them a cognitive connection from the start (whether it was positively or negatively motivated). The cross became a symbolic tool by which Beuys could initiate a dialogue based on physiological phenomena such as death, resurrection and salvation so intertwined with feelings of guilt in contemporary existence. Set in play was a bivalent conflation that coalesced the persecuted with the saved, and in its more secularized parallel the rebel with the hero. The desire was to return to the crypt in the sense of the original secret societies of the Christian Church where future martyrs would take penance and prayer over the sarcophagi of persecuted victims (fig. 20).

The metaphorical connection to early secret sects conjured notions of a faith in its incipency or in a moment of struggle when it was not sure of its footing in the space of the everyday. And adding to this sense of uncertainty, why was it that Beuys did not construct a whole cross, attempting to more forcefully reassert the strength of religious belief? There was certainly a call for this among theologians and Church officials at the time who felt the cultural crisis at large bearing in on their alters. Until the erection of the Berlin Wall in 1961, the Protestant Church functioned as a firm bond of cohesion for the nation and the community of people possessing a common language and history in both German states. Through the 1950s, this still meant, for most people, a strong commitment to church practice and not just a card-carrying membership.⁹⁴ After the physical and psychological barrier of the wall, however, the Church in both the GDR and FRG was forced to reorganize. The Protestant Churches in the Federal Republic still considered themselves the Protestant Church of Germany, but attempts to promulgate an umbrella constitution met the resistance of provincial churches. Thus, the Protestant churches remained unable to create a common public forum that would address broad theological and social issues relating to the future of the nation. According to Jurgen Moltmann as he recalled the period, "the degeneration of Protestant faith into folkloric myth poses a real danger in this country."⁹⁵ It was perceived that lack of unity would result in a provincialism and mysticism contrary to an emergence out of the recent devastation into a faith in the contemporary world. A *Der Spiegel* opinion poll titled "What do Germans Believe?" (1968) and a poll taken by the Church, "How Stable is the Church?" (1974) revealed that the People's Church (a term coined and persisting since 1919 when the government of Weimar judicially terminated the state Church and the Protestant regional churches conceived of themselves as *volkskirchen*) designated only the administration of civil religion. Here civil religion is understood in terms of Rousseau's distinction between "civil" and "universal

human" religion; the "pure spiritual religion" of Christianity being subsumed in the latter.⁹⁶ Moltmann also speculated:

...it is not overly pessimistic to ask how Christian the ecclesiastically administered civil religion in the Federal Republic really is. The more open and universal the People's Church becomes, the less binding its offer. In this way it itself produces and reproduces the very identity crisis and legitimization problems from which it suffers.⁹⁷

In line with this sense of the inability of the Church to embody an effective identity and a community in the social field, polls estimated that while overall ninety percent of the West German population was registered as 'belonging' to the Church, only fifteen percent of Protestants and fifty percent of Catholics claimed active participation (these being the predominant faiths in the Federal Republic).⁹⁸ This continued secularization within technological society was certainly an experience shared by other Western European nations, but due to its historical record of dealing with a void of spiritual and moral authority among the populace, West Germany once again becomes a special case.

As the projects for overall social transformation multiplied and revealed themselves in various forms, so to did the projects for renewal of faith to oppose or at least more equitably balance the existential scales so heavily weighted towards materialistic outlooks. The radical youth, while certainly not attempting a grand corral back towards the altar, were aware in the same way as Beuys of the danger of an over-determined climate of materialism within the populace. They interpreted it and sought solutions, however, in different means. Whereas Beuys saw a spiritual void within the population at large that could be filled by a reworked Germanically-tailored symbolic language, the youth saw gluttonous apathy, also significant of a lack, but one that could only be properly alleviated through conscious politicization. Awareness of these positions reveals the disparity between the very kinds of change each was seeking. Yet the sets of views were undeniably cultivated from the same set of historical pressures, and thus the viability in Beuys' program was that he endeavored poignant action based on these pressures. And by leaving the intended goal of the action vague or ambiguous, it seemed to some that the intention could be to avert the repetition of a horrific past, thereby producing a veneer of benevolent aspiration.

The demoralization of World War I, followed by the climate of insincerity and corruption cultivated by ineffectual Weimar officials, rising inflation and street violence had created a social space of despair and emptiness that Hitler was all too prepared to step into. With this perspective there seems a historical link between moments of extreme public loss of faith both in pre-Hitlerian Germany and the postwar Federal Republic of the late 1960s. The point of this is not to draw a direct trajectory of intentionality between Beuys' project and the Nazi agenda, but rather to reveal that as similar conditions provided grounding for both, Beuys' work as a retrieval of *volkische* myth and mysticism was

in a historical nexus of even greater criticality, ever more tightly wrapped in a simultaneity of significance and controversy. One critical psychological factor behind the Weimar government's failure to inspire confidence was its inability to cultivate any mystique. "Republicanism in Germany had no roots, no traditions to which it could appeal. There were no Republican barricades in German history to which the government could hark back: no republican songs, no slogans like "Liberty, Equality, Fraternity."⁹⁹ With no precedence of success and the uncertainty engendered, Germans were more easily led to return to the familiar traditions of the *volk* propagated by Hitler's secularized religion. The fear that this could happen again in the late 1960s was announced by Moltmann in the previous passage, that for a Federal Republic still with no modern model of democracy to pride themselves on and a failing state religion, it was a slippery slope back into provincialism.

It was a slippery slope on which Beuys wore iron soles, hoping the weight would allow him to maneuver his way rather than lose control, between such historical pressures and contemporary desires to heal. The title of the *aktion* itself raised numerous questions alluding to the difficult problems that Germany faced: spiritual voids, the masses of bodies piled in concentration camp trenches as well as the mass spectacles that had occurred while other bodies were burned or gassed, and in general the need to fill the historical vacuum that prompted and perpetuated public silence. The overarching emptiness then became symbolized in the cross, which in its iron materiality recalled what had been the highest honor offered for military service in the German army of the Third Reich. A symbol that was raped of any sense of individual or national pride once invested in it. A cross which in its three-dimensionality extended the sculpture to another Church practice, that of reliquary. As Beuys not only constructed the relic, but also controlled its contents, he himself became like the saint whose very touch lent a superhuman power to the object. Thus, if Benjamin Buchloh was certain from the start that Beuys would become a national hero, it was not a difficult extrapolation to transfigure the hero into a saint. The cross coffer, at once symbol of the fractured state of the nation, and the globe, fell back upon the individual psyche. The choices of form and material in the particular space tweaking associations, stimulating visual images in the psyche, not readily conjured in the 'real' world where competition and boredom reigned. If even for an instant fat and bodies, pumps and guns, guns and bodies, blood and sweat and iron and erosion and corrosion beneath the earth all potentially became part of the event.

Yet despite the primacy of the sculpture construction to the *aktion* as a whole, honing in as close as the lens of illumination will allow, we see more clearly the ultimate site of knowledge and power production within the *aktion*, Beuys' body itself. In its immediacy and viscosity it was the most cohered conjuncture between objectivity and subjectivity, and physiological phenomena and normative feelings and values. Beuys demonstrated a clear desire to conflate his own body with the body of Christ as he knelt down, stretched his arms out in perpendicular to the stem of his torso and bowed his head slightly, such as a body would hang on a crucifix, and as he wielded the Eurasian staff with

all the authority of Christ the good shepherd, purportedly conducting cosmological energy as well as spiritual energy. It was indeed, only the “sacred” body that he perceived capable of negotiating the seemingly symbolic cause and effect disparity between the sculpture of Breker and Giacometti.

Always clad in his own “contemporary costume” the bodily conflation ran much deeper than would a fictional theatrical production during which the role playing is im-



Figure 21. Beuys' bodily posturing

mediately transparent. Beuys attempted to blur the boundaries of role playing, so that he was seen and perceived as a body writhing with a power from beyond the realm of terrestrial life. This role had been constructed before by the most notorious of German Dadaists, Johann Baader. If Beuys was oblique in his self-Christological references in his *aktionen*, Baader publicly proclaimed himself the new Christ as well as *Der Oberdada* (Supreme Dada). Such self-grandizements were, however, coupled with playful urban insurrections and interruptions of the normative proceedings of daily life. Baader succeeded in arresting a service in the Berlin Cathedral by momentarily seizing control of the altar and firing questions such as “What is Christ to the Common Man?” to which he answered “Christ is a sausage.” He also presented himself as a candidate for the Reichstag as well as the Nobel Peace Prize.¹⁰⁰ It is of course in retrospect amusing to recount the actions of Baader, but what is important to the present study is the role of the artist he constructed for himself as an attempt to challenge tradition, bourgeois culture, and the conceptualization of art. Baader played a representative role within Dada, by attempting to act “outside” conventional society and culture, but significantly not just outside as in marginalized to the periphery, rather outside and above. It is this issue of the positioning of the artist and the work of art in relation to society through the use of Christian symbolism that sheds more light on Beuys' construction. As we saw with the half cross, in the containment of

chaotic material in the order of the cross chest and in the claim to unite energy from East and West, Beuys perceived an overcoming of dialectic as part of the possible. He, like Baader, constructed a position for himself at once contingent yet outside cultural exchange. In doing this he provoked a dialogue with notions of the dynamics of both history and reality as they were theorized at the time. As Susan Buck-Morss relates, "...whereas Hegel saw negativity, the movement of a concept towards its "other," as merely a moment in a larger process toward systematic completion, Adorno saw no possibility of an argument coming to rest in unequivocal synthesis."¹⁰¹ Perhaps most significant to an investigation of Beuys' project, was Adorno's belief that, "Non-reconciliatory thinking was compelled by objective conditions: because the contradictions of society could not be banished by means of thought, contradiction could not be banished within thought either."¹⁰² If Adorno recognized the irreconcilability of the tensions within the social structure, the lost sense of wholeness caused by the decay of the bourgeois era, Beuys embraced Hegel's terms of the dialectic in order to overcome contradiction towards a holistic social order. Because Hegel's dialectical perception foresaw an ultimate synthesis, it allowed space for Beuys to construct his role as "artist of unification". In Adorno's theories, the division between self and other could not be overcome because each remained posited in critical reference to one another.

Beuys was critiqued at the time by the left for his lack of deference to the perpetual nature of the dialectic, but this lack was crucial to his ability to engender a sense of healing and well-being in his viewers. Body art was thus the essential mode for him to work with as it allowed him to derive energy from the most essential split, that of self and other. Many artists in the 1960s read the work of the philosopher Merleau-Ponty which enabled them to see performance as the means to enact the activist within the explosive social changes taking place around them. The lived body for both performer and viewer is at once lived space and expressive space by which one experiences the world. Subject and object are not polarized but are contingent and reciprocal: "Unlike other objects in the world [in terms of artistic production a painting or isolated sculpture], the body cannot be thought of as separate from the self, nor does it signify or 'express the modalities of existence in the way that stripes indicate rank, or a house number a house: the sign here does not only convey its significance, it is filled with it." This phenomenological cognition of the body elucidates the potential force of Beuys' intentions to both intervene in and reorient a dialogue on salvation and healing through his body, and in this way also intervene in a "de-colonization" of the West German psyche as dominated by American political and cultural ideologies that had resounded with moral derision and "anti-Germanness" for over twenty years.

This intention became more apparent as Beuys alluded to the "collective wound". The wound was a constant motif running through Beuys' oeuvre, and manifest in his use of gauze as a metaphorical bandage. In *Vacuum—Mass*, Beuys raised a piece of gauze soaked in fat to his forehead and covered his eyes. The attention to the forehead or brain



Figure 22. Beuys holds fat soaked gauze over his eyes

seems to connote a psychic wound, while the oozing of fat through the porous gauze visualized as bodily excretion, a physical wound. Through the covering of the eyes an allusion to blindness is made that could be interpreted as blindness to the past when infliction of the wound occurred. Thus, the *aktion* was projected to an even greater degree as a ritual of healing. To acknowledge the wound in a communal space could be perceived as a step toward easing the inhibition to face the pain, issues of guilt, and hope for a liberated emergence from the trauma. As Georges Bataille was to describe in his text *On Nietzsche*: "...it is Christ' agony on the Cross, the lacerating, wounding experience that establishes (Christian) fellowship under God, that leads to a different form of communication. Individual integrity is torn apart and, by means of guilt, humans communicate, discovering a bond that holds them together....the evil of crucifixion establishes community and communication, taking individual being, in the moment of risk, pain and shame, beyond itself."¹⁰³ In this way, the trauma of individual internal experience can presumably become the object of meditation that seems at once internal and external to the individual, thereby blurring distinctions between object and subject. Such was the dissolving of distinctions Beuys attempted to manifest in his own body, which was at once to be both object and subject of meditation. Correspondingly, Beuys could at once signify as victim himself, able to commune with others in pain and trauma, and as authoritarian spiritual guide, able to convey an advanced ontological knowledge. A sense of community could be cultivated without dismantling the construct of his audacious role of the artist as beyond and above the "plane of the masses". With his shroud-like gauze stained by fat and sweat, an immediate relic, Beuys presented a live fleshly body, not a wooden or tempera icon, to guide individuals through a healing process.

In his own mystical ways, Beuys was converging with the Mitscherlich's psychological assertions of a German inability to mourn, and the need for a collective healing.

Later on, Beuys himself characterized his work as a form of social psychoanalysis:

Art directly examines the psyche, the soul. ...It seems to me that the question of the subconscious is still under debate, from a new perspective....I agree with Freud's diagnosis, according to which man lives to a considerable extent on his unconscious forces: however, in my opinion, Freud failed to work out a therapy or state how such a therapy could be developed.¹⁰⁴

As the Mitscherlichs, and members of the Frankfurt Institut, had taken up the ideas of Freud in order to merge them with other methodologies or to apply them to society as a whole, so too had Beuys seen a viable path in Freud's conceptualization of the force of the unconscious. Yet as his *aktionen* were realized, the often pragmatic and anti-septic vocabulary of social science, in which the subconscious is spoken *about*, gave way to a symbolic formula intended to speak *to* the subconscious. Whereas the Mitscherlich's offered a possible explication of psychic operations that might enable German individuals to more clearly understand feelings of anxiety and fracture or even an emotional numbness; Beuys preferred not to explain, not to raise consciousness through a process of informing and analyzing, but as the Surrealists before him to attempt to dig right into the psychic wound and provoke subconscious thoughts and emotions into the realm of the conscious. One cannot, however, responsibly (or intelligently for that matter) examine Beuys project without questioning, as some critics argue, that his use of symbols far from releasing subconscious elements into conscious cognition worked more in the service of perpetual mystification and a practice of subservience to a renewed tradition of domination? By remaining at a symbolic level, was *Vacuum—Mass* geared toward social cohesion only to the effect of encouraging a reconfigured community of 'blindness'?

Facing these questions, however, the strategy of utilizing the body of Christ enabled Beuys to potentially stir up feelings of guilt and desire for repentance, without the accusative finger that the Mitscherlichs had pointed at an entire society or that others were pointing towards specific individuals. Yet, in the same way that the Mitscherlich's propagation of collective guilt in a sense implicated no one for crimes to humanity, Beuys' symbolic language also remained ineffectual in terms of prosecution. This was as he intended. For while other critics were outraged by the ways former Nazis had reclaimed their social and cultural positions of authority and prestige, Beuys remained silent on the matter. In line with his negotiation in the crack between material affluence and spirituality, which afforded that individuals could remain continue capitalistic consumption as long as they spent a few hours each day communicating with rabbits, Beuys wanted to avoid direct association with either Nazi sympathizers or Nazi prosecutors. For that matter, even the effort to identify himself with tragic victims only went so far in relation to contemporary discourse. Besides the fact that an association with victims of the Holocaust was watered down through conceptualizations of Christ as symbolic of all martyred victims, or of Jesus as a Jew executed for religious blasphemy and political rebellion at the

hands of the Roman Empire, no association was made with Holocaust survivors or families of the deceased who were demanding a state agenda of monetary restitution. This was a problem the government had to contend with in relation to its Jewish citizens as well as in its relationship with Israel. A gauzy allusion to the cultural wound as well as the offering of a spiritual body (simultaneously symbol and flesh, in contrast to grotesque images of the lived body as Hiroshima or Holocaust victim) seemed to surround all of these controversial associations in an insulation that would keep the heat of friction from exploding.

What began as a potentially open-ended *aktion* appears all the more at a point of encapsulation when we consider Wolf Vostell's action art also designed to raise consciousness of bodily implication in social space. At one point, Vostell claimed that while Duchamp had qualified the object into art, he had qualified life into art. For Vostell, the element of chance that occurs in everyday life must be the spark throughout the process of reconceptualizing of art. In this brief summation of his 1966 *de-coll//age* happening called *Yellow Pages or an Action Page* we obtain a sense of what one might experience.

[the happening] ...presents performers with a page from the New York Yellow Pages and advises them to: "take this page as an instruction plan with you and during one month buy the quantities of groceries indicated in the *lebensmittelkarte* [ration card] at the designated grocers. Try to subsist that month with these comestibles only..." Vostell asks participants to live as German citizens did during World War II. Such a sustained experience requires participants to enter into both the psychological conditions and mental spaces of the average German citizen. Vostell, a German Jew who spent a nomadic childhood during World War II fleeing with his family from place to place, offered no commentary on either guilt or victimization in this action.¹⁰⁵

Vostell had taken his *de-coll//age* happenings abroad much earlier than Beuys, and thus the first thing one notices is that Vostell was performing with an American audience. This factor aside, however, the interesting element becomes the ways that Vostell engaged in debates surrounding consciousness of the realities of the War, including guilt and suffering. Vostell focussed on the body, but not his body as the sole mediator of experience, he challenged others to actually experience physical and psychological states in their own bodies. Whether they did or not was left up to chance. Once Vostell sent out a conceptual and practical model, the choice was open to the potential participant, whose decision to engage may have ended at any moment, at any sense of bodily discomfort, at any point of psychological realization. The subject was clear and concrete and the degree to which the participant attempted to create a relationship based on bodily need between him or herself and a ration card holding German citizen during the War, no matter how contrived and ultimately thin considering the drastically different social and cultural circumstances, was up to the him or her. The score, however, encouraged the viewer to consider how the constructive/deconstructive links the private body to the social body—how the physical and psychological realities of the private body (specifically in depriva-

tion) inform and are informed by historical events experienced in the social body.

By situating himself physically at the center of verbal and visual communication, the *aktion* was at once manifestation of and comment on the way artists "function as intermediaries between viewer and viewed as they point to things in the world and negotiate there meanings through symbolic productions." One question to ask, however, is to what degree this centrality of his subjecthood and the particular Christian symbolism his body embodied participated not in just a comment on but a reification of the problem of ego in the social reception of art and the ability of the performative work to convey a social message.

Conclusion

Attempting to create mystique by wrapping himself in a shroud of gauze and wearing a slippery coat of fat to preclude a firm grasp from pinning him down, Beuys constructed a work that was potentially dangerous from the start. His propensity for ambiguity, like the open wound he intended to heal, allowed for infection. The same "open-endedness" applauded by his scholarly admirers allowed for signification to extend into bacterial ridden water, and his efforts collapsed back in on him. Attempting to control the production of knowledge and power within strategically chosen spaces, he underestimated the potential volatility of exchange in those spaces themselves in the moment, and the concomitant chances that they could perhaps work contradictorily to the intentional manifest art. He lost the control he so carefully and consciously built constructs of art and the role of the artist to protect. Beuys became, and still is, most celebrated for his utilization of fat, and while jocular remarks are made about the difficulty of sitting on his fat chair, rarely discussed is the propensity for more treacherous slippage as its substantiality simultaneously seeped into the orifices of the cellar and of the subconscious. Fat signifying as everyday substance fused into artistic production, allowed the work to speak in the "hot" contemporary aesthetic languages of minimalism and conceptualism, and share the goal of merging art and life such as his former colleagues in Fluxus continued to work towards. Fat could, as Beuys claimed, display qualities of transformation from one physical state to another thereby potentially symbolic of social transformation at large, from chaos to order. Perceived as a biological substance, however, the fat became more malodorous and nauseating to touch. Considering the post-Holocaust conceptualizations of the body as grotesque and the extremity of measure that fueled the "Final Solution," the utilization of a product such as fat was incredibly loaded. The bodily flesh of Holocaust victims had been utilized for the fat to produce soaps and cosmetics during the War. In the performative recontextualization of *Vacuum—Mass*, rounds of fat were either splattered or scored with a cross as if sacred loaves of bread. Within the *aktion*, was the symbolic use of the substance a sort of commemoration to the victims or possibly a sanctification of the body in general as represented metonymically by the fat? Beuys was interested in the transformative qualities of fat, and indeed the fat of flesh will melt when a body is slid into an oven. This issue seems all the more twisted when one recalls that in the same year of 1968 Beuys sold his works to the German cosmetics manufacturer Karl Stroher.

Beuys' work raised specific questions in an attempt to intervene in the dialogue of social transformation. At the start it seemed that in many ways he shared a common goal of disruption and upheaval of tradition with the anti-authoritarian youth in the street, some of them perhaps his own students. As we proceeded through the structure and visual vocabulary of *Vacuum—Mass*, rendering it more transparent along the way through contextualization, not only the strategies, but the goals (both stated and tacitly expressed) became more and more disparate. As we left *La Fete* in the street, anticipating that there might still be some underground explosions, we descended into a space reproduced through action yes, but an action of negotiation that ultimately settled itself in tradition. The ex-

citement of spontaneity and chance above ground gave way to that “new form of order” that was antithetical to the aims of the anti-authoritarians. His work revealed an intimate awareness of the essentiality of heat for change (i.e. the selection of fat, felt and beeswax as exemplars of conductive, insulative and transformative properties), yet he shielded himself from the heat of the public exteriority of the street for fear that his own project might be desecrated in flames. Such destruction, such erasure of his endeavors was inimical to his agenda, which included an ethos of posterity. Translating thoughts into actions, Beuys’ ultimately eclipsed the importance the students placed on action itself by further translating action into object. Action found its resting place in the traditional site of the *objet d’art*, revealing the fact that his work was more about a revitalization of the notion of the individual artist, about carving a position within the art world, than the goals of social activism that he claimed. Despite his award-winning performance as a marginalized eccentric, his notoriety as a leader grew to wider and wider circles. Even certain of his colleagues at the Academy who did not sign the mistrust manifesto, and could appreciate his particular aesthetic, perceived him to be garnering too much sway over his students and the creative climate of the university as a whole. Rather than ‘scuttle’ himself, however, as did the anti-authoritarian leaders Rudi Dutschke and Dany Cohn-Bendit, Beuys perceived a new moment of potentiality in which his “mission” need be expanded beyond German borders.¹⁰⁶

By 1969, the moment of the possible was over in West Germany, and the days of *La Fete* gave way to pure violence and destruction. The new sensibility of playful sexual liberation, granted mixed at times with the throwing of rocks and bottles and Molotov cocktails, had not worked. If when Beuys performed *Vacuum—Mass* in October 1968 the moment had not yet come to “go underground,” the moment arrived just over a year later. The SDS disbanded in disillusionment, and cultural terrorism took the Federal Republic by the throat torturing it throughout the 1970s. If citizens felt threatened by the dynamic of action and reaction in the years 1967-69, they felt impossibly helpless over the course of the next ten. After the events at the close of the sixties, the contextual positioning of the concept of democracy itself seemed completely altered, was it subsequently a viable standard bearer around which discussions of social transformation and how to solve the problem of violence could coagulate? Concomitantly, could a utopic notion of Social Sculpture hold the same position of potentiality once anarchy was surpassed by terrorism? On the one hand a notion of democracy without hierarchies, on the other a concrete social situation in which utopias had been suppressed for too long provoking individuals to “flip out.” In West Germany, it became no longer possible to speak of democracy in terms of the anarchical vision, for among the majority of the populace it was conflated as the harbinger of terrorism. Realizing that the anarchists had been aiming to realize “the impossible” rather than “the possible,” the situation transposed into an even greater chaos with which they were implicated through a generalization born of fear.

It thus seems more significant that it was not until 1970 that Beuys made his first

major foray into the English speaking world. He was known there through numerous announcements in international art journals, but those individuals who were not of the same murky, romantic mystical penchant found deep amongst the trees of the Black Forest had yet to experience him first hand. At home, his actions were also forced into reorientation. As the moment of the possible drifted away leaving in its wake scraps of special interest from which would emerge the fractured landscape of political activism from then on, the opportunity was gone for Beuys work to maintain the same complex web of frictions. Connective dialogues between diverse politicized spheres lost some of their adhesive stick as the terrain of cultural politics shifted, and although Beuys notoriety continued to escalate, he ran in the direction of the parliamentarized Green flag leaving the memory of the black one, he once gave impulse to reach, tattered in the street.

Notes

¹ The description of the *aktion* is developed primarily from the documentation in Tisdall, Caroline. *Joseph Beuys*. New York: Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1979. And Adriani, Gotz, Winfried Konnertz and Karin Thomas. *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*. Patricia Lech, trans. New York: Barron's, 1979. For this quotation see Tisdall p. 130.

² For the purposes of this study, *Vacuum—Mass* is taken as a representative example of Beuys' work between the years 1967-69. This is validated by the fact that he thought it to be the work that most closely related sculpture to action, the idea of his "social sculpture". (see Tisdall, Caroline, 1979. P. 114.)

³ Sharp, Willoughby. "An Interview with Joseph Beuys," *Artforum*. Vol. VIII, No. 4. December, 1969. Pp. 40-47.

⁴ In "The Circulation of Social Energy," Sidney Greenblatt's proposed usage of a notion of energy, born of rhetoric and socially and historically contingent, which in its aesthetic form, embodies a modicum of predictability, range and adaptability, offers a provocative means of thinking about the collective production of meaning, albeit fractured, and its ability to acquire compelling force within a specific moment but also to retain this force, albeit altered, across historical periods. See *Culture/Power/History*. Nicolas B. Dirks, Geoff Eley and Sherry B. Ortner, eds. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. Pp. 504-519. Quotation p. 507.

⁵ Due to the scope of this thesis, it is written only with English language reception in mind. Time was not sufficient to pour through the mountain of literature on Beuys in his own beloved German.

⁶ Gandy, Matthew. "Contradictory Modernities: Conceptions of Nature in the Art of Joseph Beuys and Gerhard Richter," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 87 (4), 1997. Pp. 636-659.

⁷ Jones, *Amelia*. *Body Art Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. P. 104.

⁸ See Heibel, Yule F. *Reconstructing the Subject: Modernist Painting in Western Germany, 1945-50*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995. P. 72. She notes the example of J.A. von Rantzau's work in which, "Romanticism—excess, radicalism, 'irrationalism'—is linked explicitly to 'Eastern,' that is, anti-occidental, tendencies. Not only is the connection made between pro-Western attitudes and rationality established, but also between 'Eastern' thought and the opposition to reason: i.e., a geographical basis for ideological preferences."

⁹ As Erich Fromm, an associate of the Frankfurt Institut for Social Research, remarked somewhat ironically in 1941 essay entitled "Fear of Freedom": "...democracy in the Weimar Republic worked only too well. The Reichstag was an all too accurate reflection of conflicting interests and classes in the Republic, many of which were fundamentally opposed to any form of compromise and therefore unwilling to pay even lip-service to the constitution's basic principles." As cited in "Weimar Culture: the Birth of Modernism," in *German Cultural Studies*. Rob Burns, ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995. P. 57.

¹⁰ Buchloh, Benjamin, Jean-François Chevrier and Catherine David. "1960-1997, The Political Potential of Art," interview. *Politics – Poetics: Documenta X – the Book*. Kassel: Cantz Verlag, 1997. P. 378.

¹¹ This statement, although accurate, should not mislead one to think that all laborers were living the "high life". Much of the abuse and lack of benefits previously experienced by a more expansive body of people was transferred to the experience of many unskilled laborers allowed into the Federal Republic from southern European countries. This may have solved labor shortage problems, but it exacerbated racial and ethnic tensions.

¹² Katzenstein, Peter J. *Policy and Politics in West Germany: the Growth of a Semisovereign State*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987. P. 130.

¹³ Buchloh, Benjamin, Jean-François Chevrier and Catherine David. "1960-1997, The Political Potential of Art," *Politics – Poetics: Documenta X – the Book*. Kassel: Cantz Verlag, 1997. P. 397.

¹⁴ Hans Magnus Enzensberger recalls his own disdain for the "greed" he perceived among many West Germans in an essay entitled "Poor Little Rich Germany! Preliminary Sketches for a Study of Manners," in *Political Crumbs*. Martin Chalmers, trans. London: Verso, 1990.

¹⁵ Smith, Owen F. "Fluxus: a Brief History," *In the Spirit of Fluxus*. Elizabeth Armstrong and Joan Rothfuss, eds. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993. P. 30.

¹⁶ Abosch, Heinz. *The Menace of the Miracle: Germany from Hitler to Adenauer*. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1963. P. vi.

¹⁷ Huyssen, Andreas. *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*. New York: Routledge, 1995. P. 7.

¹⁸ Novakov, Anna, ed. *Veiled Histories: the body, Place and Public Art*. New York: Critical Press, 1997. P. 68.

¹⁹ This question became all the more pertinent and potentially answerable in the affirmative in 1968. One area of domestic security that had remained under the control of the Allies until 1968 was the power to declare a state of emergency and to mobilize civilian resources in time of crisis or war. According to certain definitions of sovereignty that state a nation is not sovereign until it has the power to determine crisis situations independently, West Germany was not fully sovereign until 1968. This opening from the past created the space for a clashing of youth optimism for change, and the government's ambition to promulgate its first ever German Emergency Laws.

²⁰ Fichter, Tilman and Siegwald Lonnendonker. "Berlin – Violence and Counter – Violence," *Berlin: a Critical View Ugly Realism 20s – 70s*, exh. cat. London: The Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1978. P. 247.

²¹ Kurt Georg Kiesinger had joined the NSDAP in 1933 and served in the Reich Broadcasting Corporation during the war. While the radical youth found it appalling that anyone once even affiliated with the running of Hitler's regime should have no avenue to hold position of power in a new Republic, especially that of the highest post. Others expiated him by claiming that he had risked his life to aid Jews and others persecuted by the regime. See Bark, Dennis L. and David R. Gress. *Democracy and its Discontents, 1963-1991*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. P. 61.

²² As quoted in the postscript of Jaspers, Karl. *The Future of Germany*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967. P. 165.

²³ Moeller, Robert. "Writing the History of West Germany," *West Germany Under Construction*. Moeller, ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997. P. 5.

²⁴ *Der Spiegel*, November 7, 1962.

²⁵ *Der Spiegel*, November 14, 1962.

²⁶ *Ibid.* p. 111.

²⁷ Fichter, Tilman and Siegwald Lonnendonker. "Berlin-Violence and Counter-Violence," in *Berlin: a Critical View Ugly Realism 20s-70s*. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1978. P. 243. Springer press publications were considered the worst manifestation of the 'culture industry' perpetuating a blind consciousness and apathy within the West German population.

²⁸ Karl, Willibald. "Students and the Youth Movement in Germany: attempt at a Structural Comparison," *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol. 5, No. 1, 1970. Pp. 123-124.

²⁹ As quoted in Fichter and Lonnendonker, p. 243.

³⁰ As shall be discussed in chapter three, the events of World War II, and more recently the 1961 erection of the Berlin Wall, significantly altered the perception and utilization of the Church as an organ of cohesion and meaning in contemporary life.

³¹ Kaprow, Allan. *Essays on the Blurring of Art and Life*. Jeff Kelly, ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. P. 56.

³² Significant for the present discussion of aesthetic production and critical politics, many students in the 1960s in West Germany might have learned of *The White Rose* movement through attendance at the *Hochschule für Gestaltung* (College of Design) in Ulm. Founded by the sister of the Scholl siblings who had been arrested and executed in 1944 in Munich for their participation in The White Rose, the school was a deliberate continuation of the Bauhaus at Dessau that had been shut down by the Nazis in the 1930s. The artist Max Bill was to be the first director when the doors opened in 1955, and although essentially non-political, his belief "that the artist should be governed by a high sense of moral duty to the community and his desire for a cultural synthesis through the arts could attract those who held an organic point of view towards culture and society, as the Bauhaus had done earlier." At this site, histories of avant-garde art and political resistance commingled providing roots from which would grow a radical point of view toward design and a social point of view that was also radical in its anti-conservatism, but often apolitical in its vision of social utopianism. In this way, although expressed in very different forms, the new Bauhaus had commonalities with Beuys' ideas and practice of creating a total environment. Quotation as cited in: Egbert, Donald Drew. *Social Radicalism and the Arts*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970. P. 700.

³³ Roditi, Edouard. "Germany: the New 'Ecole de Berlin'", *Arts Magazine*. Vol. 39, No. 10. Sept.-Oct. 1965. Pp. 45-47.

³⁴ To "stop the course of, successfully oppose, keep off or out, prevent from penetrating, repel, be proof against or unaffected or uninjured by, abstain from...strive against, oppose, try to impede, refuse to comply with..." was a 1969 oxford dictionary definition of resistance in 1969.

³⁵ Fichter, Tilman and Siegwand Lonnendonker. "Berlin - Violence and Counter - Violence," *Berlin: a Critical View Ugly Realism 20s - 70s*, exh. cat. London: The Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1978. P. 246.

³⁶ Marcuse, Herbert. *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1964. P. 23.

³⁷ The student revolutionary leader and his student followers took Rosa Luxembourg as the German heroine of revolution for her persistent demands that the bourgeois government of Weimar realize the 'true' socialist aims of the revolution. Ultimately she gave her life rather than compromise.

³⁸ From a speech made at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, January 1974.

³⁹ Bellman, David. "Beuys' 'Social Sculpture' in Historical Perspective," *Diverging Critiques*. David Thistlewood, ed. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995. P. 186.

⁴⁰ Egbert, Donald Drew. *Social Radicalism and the Arts*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1970. P. 45.

⁴¹ Tisdall, Caroline. *Joseph Beuys*. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1979. P. 44.

⁴² Lefebvre, Henri. *Critique of Everyday Life*, volume one. John Moore, trans. Verso: London, 1991. P. 113.

⁴³ Ibid. p. 112.

⁴⁴ Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces: a Secret History of the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. Pp. 5-6.

⁴⁵ Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Donald Nicholson-Smith, trans. Oxford: Blackwell, 1996. Pp. 166-67.

⁴⁶ See "The Interview with ND," in Willener, Alfred. *The Action – Image of Society*. London: Tavistock Publications, 1970. P. 14.

⁴⁷ Benjamin makes this claim several times in his notes for *Das Passagen – Werk*. See *Walter Benjamin Besammelte Schriften*. Vol. V.1.2. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhauser, eds. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1972 -. Pp. 533, 994, 1051.

⁴⁸ Rubin Suleiman, Susan. "Bataille in the Street: the Search for Virility in the 1930s," *Critical Inquiry*. Vol. 21, No. 1. Autumn 1994. Pp. 61. This essay was subsequently published in *Georges Bataille: Writing the Sacred*, Carolyn Gill, ed. London: Routledge, 1994. P. 62.

⁴⁹ Mehring, Walter, Berlin-Dada (Zurich, 1959). As cited in *Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art*. David O'Connell, ed. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984. P. 32.

⁵⁰ Egbert, Donald Drew. *Social Radicalism and the Arts: Western Europe a Cultural History From the French Revolution to 1968*. New York: Alfred A, Knopf, 1970. P. 292.

⁵¹ Ibid. p. 62.

⁵² Davis, Natalie. *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1965. P. 130.

⁵³ The quote is taken from an interview with a French student as she considered not just the French context, but new methods within the student movement as a whole circa 1968. Willener, Alfred. *The Action – Image of Society: on Cultural Politicization*. A.M. Sheridan Smith, trans. London: Tavistock Publications, 1970. P. 14.

⁵⁴ Fichter, Tilman and Lonnendonker. "Berlin – Violence and Counter-Violence," *Berlin: a Critical View Ugly Realism 20s – 70s*. London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1978. P. 246.

⁵⁵ Huelsenbeck, *Deutschland muss untergehen!* Pp. 7-8. Jeffrey Faude, trans. As cited in Marcus, Greil. *Lipstick Traces*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989. P. 113.

⁵⁶ Bell, Catherine. *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

⁵⁷ Enzensberger, Hans Magnus. *Political Crumbs*. London: Verso, 1990. P. 114.

⁵⁸ Beane, Wendell C. and William G. Doty, eds. *Myths, Rites and Symbols*. New York: Harper and Row, 1976. P. 143.

⁵⁹ One might recall here Pythagoras' descent into Hades accompanied by a spiritual guide or the similar tale in Dante's *Inferno*.

⁶⁰ Huyssen, Andreas. "The Cultural Politics of Pop", (first printed in *New German Critique*. Vol. 4, Winter 1975. Pp. 77-98) reprinted in *After the Great Divide*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986. Pp. 141-159.

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 153.

⁶² Ibid. p. 154.

⁶³ Buchloh, Benjamin, Jean-François Chevrier and Catherine David, interview. "The Political Potential of Art, 1960-1997," *Politics – Poetics Documenta X – the Book*. Kassel: Cantz Verlag, 1997. P. 384-85.

⁶⁴ Ibid. P. 385.

⁶⁵ Joseph Beuys as quoted in Tisdall, Caroline. *Joseph Beuys*. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, 1979. P. 95.

⁶⁶ For an analysis of the phenomenon of the 1960s, whereby the artist began to alter the romantic conception of the studio as well as the role of the artist in the studio, and then eventually to move beyond the studio into the social environment at large see Caroline A. Jones book *The Machine in the Studio*, 1996. She chooses to focus on the practices of three of the most prominent figures within the American art world of the 1960s: Frank Stella, Andy Warhol and Robert Smithson.

⁶⁷ As quoted in: Jones, Caroline A. *The Machine in the Studio*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996. P. 363.

⁶⁸ The article referred to, "Trends: New Art in Germany – Thighs, Breasts, Bikinis and Garters in the Bundesrepublik," was written by Rolf-Gunter Dienst for *Arts Magazine*. Vol. 41, no. 2/3. December 1966 - January 1967. Pp. 51-53. Dienst has an awareness that the previously most successful German derivation of abstraction, the Tachism of Group Zero, had become paralyzed by its own principles, yet seems to have great enthusiasm for the more recent abstract canvases as much evolved and fresh.

⁶⁹ See Serge Guilbaut. *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*. Arthur Goldhammer, trans. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

⁷⁰ Art Informel, imported from France, also made an impact primarily through the door of Düsseldorf, Beuys center of production, and where the Group Zero had previously developed its well received German variation of Tachism. Düsseldorf was the most cosmopolitan of West German urban centers at the start of the decade due to its proximity to Paris. Thus, Beuys was perhaps offered a slightly earlier look at certain international styles, and therefore prepared for his future battle.

⁷¹ Although as Yule Heibel analyzes, each of these forms of post war abstraction were distinct, it was easier for them to be conflated within the context of Germany where all three styles were imports of the occupying powers. Once the term abstract was co-opted by American rhetoric of "freedom", it became impossible for viewers to distinguish any difference, and thus impossible for abstraction to be an art of dissent. See Heibel, Yule. *Reconstructing the Subject: Modernist Painting in Western Germany, 1945-50*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995.

⁷² Ibid. p. 142.

⁷³ Jones, Amelia. *Body Art: Performing the Subject*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. P. 85.

⁷⁴ Heibel. P. 133.

⁷⁵ Ibid. p.

⁷⁶ Moffit, John. Occultism and the Avant-garde

⁷⁷ Dienst, Rolf-Gunter. "Trends: New Art in Germany Thighs, Breasts, Bikinis and Garters in the Bundesrepublik," *Arts Magazine*. Vol. 41, No. 2/3. December 1966 – January 1967. Pp. 51-53.

⁷⁸ Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. P. 67.

⁷⁹ A quotation from Jochen Gerz in Novakov, Anna, ed. *Veiled Histories: the Body, Place and Public Art*. New York: Critical Press, 1997. P. 68.

⁸⁰ Bark, Dennis L. and David R. Gress. *From Shadow to Substance 1945-1963*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989. P. 171.

⁸¹ Russell, Lord of Liverpool. *Return of the Swastika*. New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1969. P. 130.

⁸² Adriani, Konnertz and Thomas. P. 162.

⁸³ Ibid. p. 162.

⁸⁴ This exchange was related by a student protester in the interview found in Alfred Willener's *The Action - Image of Society: on Cultural Politicization*. A.M. Sheridan Smith, trans. London: Tavistock Publications, 1970. P. 14.

⁸⁵ Ibid. P. 179.

⁸⁶ Sommer, Ed. "Bauhaus and Documenta", *Art International*. Vol. XII, No. 7. Sept. 20, 1968. Pp. 31.

⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 32.

⁸⁸ The contradiction in Beuys' rhetoric of being "unconcerned with objects, is further highlighted by the observation that after Karl Stroher lent his entire collection of Beuys' work to the Darmstadt Landesmuseum, "Beuys enjoyed nothing more than to go to Darmstadt to add new sculptures and drawings, and recompose the existing installation....Beuys always made it clear that he wanted the entire work to be seen together and to remain as a single installation." See Hall, James. "Joseph Beuys: Fat Profits," *Apollo*. Vol. CXXIX, No. 328. June, 1989. Pp. 406-408.

⁸⁹ Professor John O'Brien, undoubtedly just one of many, recalled to me his experience of asking Beuys in person if he could purchase an *aktion* blackboard, only to have his acquisitional desires responded to in the negative. This was in the 1970s, after Beuys had 'made his deal' with Stroher.

⁹⁰ Burns, Rob and Wilfried van der Will. *Protest and Democracy in West Germany*. London: Macmillan Press, 1988. P. 109.

⁹¹ It was late in 1966 when a group of international destructioneers met in the basement of a bookstore in London's Soho district (providing another example of a subaltern anarchic assembly). The meeting marked a symposium on destruction in art, during which a typical daily program might include: Tony West running classic books through a crank meat grinder, Al Hansen exploding a motorscooter causing several photographers to fall from their perches, John Latham burning multiple towers of Encyclopedia Britannicas, and Schreib's artful burning of Brandt.

⁹² Ibid. p. 53.

⁹³ In this passage, Stiles directly cites the work of the anthropologist Robert Plant Armstrong, and his conceptualization of the "affective presence" of objects as created by the way they are manipulated through human activities. See Stiles. "Between Water and Stone" in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, 1993. P. 85.

⁹⁴ Bark and Gress. *From Shadow to Substance 1945-63*. P. 337.

⁹⁵ See Moltmann's essay in *Observation on "The Spiritual Situation of the Age:" Contemporary German Perspectives*. Jurgen Habermas, ed. A. Buchwater, trans. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984.

⁹⁶ Moltmann, Jurgen. "Theology in Germany Today", in *Observations on "the Spiritual Situation of the Age": Contemporary German Perspectives*. English translation. Jurgen Habermas, ed. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1984. P. 189.

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 190.

⁹⁸ The wall was a concrete symbol of the futility of the Church to be an overarching unifying force in modern society, but added to this was the implication of the Catholic Church in the travesties of War that many West Germans could not resolve, within themselves or with the institution. It was an implication associated with the cross through the post war years in West Germany, directly raising the "Jewish question [that] as much as any other factor led to the upheaval in the Catholic Church in the sixties, the biggest transformation for Rome since the sixteenth, possibly twelfth, century. Pope Pius XII had disgraced the Papacy during the War by failing to come to the aid of Jews being murdered by the thousands and then millions, and allowing the Holocaust to occur without even public remorse let alone vehement condemnation from the Church. Having previous ties to and adoration of Germany as an ambassador, the Pope remained silent, offering no comfort and certainly no inspiration of moral authority to those Germans wanting to oppose Hitler. The Church had failed the victims of National Socialism on all counts. Despite this, the Church not surprisingly defended Pius arguing that by remaining silent he had actually saved millions of Catholic lives. This convinced no one, however, it was only with the election of John XXIII in the early 1960s, that condemnation apology and reform would come from inside the Church.

⁹⁹ Cantor, Norman F. *Twentieth-Century Culture Modernism to Deconstruction*. New York: Peter lang, 1988. P. 313.

¹⁰⁰ For a more detailed account of Baader's activities than is at present necessary, see Stephen C. Foster's "Johannes Baader: The Complete Dada", in *Dada/Dimensions*. Foster, ed. Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1985. Pp. 249-271.

¹⁰¹ Buck-Morss, Susan. *The Origin of Negative Dialectics*. New York: The Free Press, 1977. P. 63.

¹⁰² Ibid. p. 63.

¹⁰³ See the introduction to the edited volume of Bataille's writings: *The Bataille Reader*. Fred Botting and Scott Wilson, eds. Oxford: Blackwell, 1997. Pp. 8-9.

¹⁰⁴ See interview between Beuys and Achille Bonito Oliva, "Death Keeps me Awake," in *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America*. Carin Kuoni, ed. New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990. P. 165.

¹⁰⁵ Stiles, Kristine. "Between Water and Stone. Fluxus Performance: a Metaphysics of Acts," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*. Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1993. P. 70.

¹⁰⁶ In the student movements of the late 1960s, the term scuttling referred to the predicament when the leader of a group exhibited signs of exerting undue influence, or the group displayed signs of excessive dependence on him, and he steps down himself or is demoted to the ranks in order to save the collective. See Willener, Alfred. P. 95, fn.

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