

One of the most significant shifts in contemporary art during the past two decades concerns artists and collectives who have moved their artistic focus from representation to direct social action. This publication shows why this transition might change our understanding of artistic production at large and make us reconsider the role of art in society. The book gathers internationally recognized artists, scholars, and experts in the field of socially engaged art to reflect upon historical developments in this field and explore the role that German artist Joseph Beuys's concept of social sculpture played in its evolution. The contributions provide theoretical reflections, historical analysis, and frame critical debates about exemplary socially engaged art projects since the 1970s in order to examine the strategies, opportunities, and failures of this practice.

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The Art of
Direct Action
Social Sculpture
and Beyond

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reproducing this paradoxical and uncanny predicament, this "bare art world," and how to actively halt the worst, most demoralizing aspects of what goes by the name of reality today.

Joseph Beuys and Feminism in the United States: Social Sculpture Meets Consciousness- Raising

Cara M. Jordan

When Joseph Beuys arrived in the United States for the first time in early January 1974, his goal was twofold: to spread the word about his concept of social sculpture and to "find out what is essential about the personality of Americans."¹ Over the course of his ten-day, three-city tour, which included New York, Chicago, and Minneapolis, Beuys met with students and artists, gave press conferences, and visited tourist destinations. During his well-attended "public dialogues," he discussed how postwar society could be transformed into a holistic, interconnected whole by fostering human creativity. Rather than criticizing politics and society—as he had been doing in West Germany since the early 1960s—the artist wanted to show his audiences a new, positive vision of the

¹ From January 9 to 19, 1974, Beuys traveled the United States, meeting with the press, other artists, and lecturing about his "Energy Plan for the Western Man" at the New School for Social Research, the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, and the University of Minnesota. In a press conference held upon his arrival, journalist Willi Bongard paraphrased Beuys's statement "daß es Ihnen darum gehe, herauszufinden, was das Wesentliche in der Persönlichkeit der Mehrheit der Amerikaner sei." Willi Bongard, "Die Kunst ist nicht im Überbau: Gespräch mit Joseph Beuys nach seiner Rückkehr aus Amerika," *Die Welt* (Hamburg), February 6, 1974, sec. Sport/Kultur. For more on Beuys's trip, see Carin Kuoni, *Joseph Beuys in America: Energy Plan for the Western Man: Writings by and Interviews with the Artist* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990); and Klaus Staack and Gerhard Steidl, eds., *Beuys in America* (Heidelberg: Edition Staack, 1997).

future in which everyone could participate and become his "cooperators."² Because of their efforts to be more inclusive of women's contributions to the public sphere, Beuys was particularly curious about the activities of the Women's Liberation movement, so his gallerist Ronald Feldman and his wife Frayda arranged for him to meet with a group of feminist artists and critics, including Lucy Lippard, Cindy Nemser, Faith Ringgold, and Yoko Ono, at a breakfast at his hotel.³

While he had anticipated their cooperation—and in retrospect considered all his meetings in the United States congenial—the attendees were less than satisfied, even "angry," with his presentation.⁴ Echoing the tension that had arisen at his discussion at the New School two nights before, in which the audience seemed at times to heckle him, the women were outspokenly critical of his demeanor, which they characterized as "paternalistic," and his apparent lack of interest in their work (he later commented that he had been unable to grasp "how the women wanted to free themselves").⁵ While

2 In an interview with Klaus Staeck about the trip, Beuys said, "I want to make clear that my ideas are principles that indeed are looking for a new way. Furthermore I would like to encourage as many groups as possible to contribute to these ideas, therefore to consider them as future cooperators." Beuys quoted in "The Point, at Which the Forms Arise," in *Beuys in America*, ed. Klaus Staeck and Gerhard Steidl, 214.

3 This breakfast, held at the Stanhope Hotel on January 13, 1974, was organized by Frayda Feldman, who along with her husband Ronald Feldman (Beuys's New York dealer), made all of the arrangements for Beuys's tour of the United States. Ronald Feldman, interview with the author, New York, April 15, 2015. All of the attendees were women, but not all were self-described feminists, and included Edit de Ak, Liza Béar, Camille Billops, Lynn Epstein, Frayda Feldman, Madeline Gins, Peggy Kaplan, Joan Jonas, Lucy Lippard, Brenda Miller, Mary Miss, Cindy Nemser, Yoko Ono, Lil Picard, Faith Ringgold, Dorothea Rockburne, Ulrike Rosenbach, Caroline Tisdall, Marcia Tucker, Jackie Winsor, and Tobi Zausner. The Feldman Gallery archives contains a list of attendees.

4 Joan Jonas quoted from a panel in which she, Camille Billops, Mary Miss, Dorothea Rockburne, and Marcia Tucker reflected on their experience that morning. *Feminism* panel, "Considering Joseph Beuys" conference, The New School for Social Research, April 6, 1995, cassette recording, NS070202-000007, The New School Archives, New York. Most of those present remarked that both they and the other attendees they spoke with in preparation for the panel had little to no memory of the breakfast, which concurs with the lack of response to my own research inquiries on this topic.

5 When asked by Bongard to elaborate on why the meeting with the women had been so important, Beuys responded, "Nach meinem Eindruck stellen die amerikanischen Frauen ein politisches Potential dar, von dem man sich viel versprochen hat. Mir ist allerdings nicht klar geworden, wie die sich befreien wollen. Die große, zusammenhängende, übergreifende Idee habe ich nicht angetroffen." Beuys quoted in Bongard, "Die Kunst ist nicht im Überbau."



Joseph Beuys (left), breakfast with New York women, January 13, 1974. Photo © Peggy Jarrell Kaplan; courtesy of Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

Beuys had preached about the ability of art to revolutionize society by expanding its definition to include the shaping of politics and economics, for second-wave feminist artists and curators like Marcia Tucker, art had not altered their situation: "[women] had fewer exhibitions and opportunities, their work sold for less, and they weren't as prominent as their male counterparts."⁶ What could a famous male artist, particularly one from Europe, possibly contribute to their movement?

These vocal members of second-wave feminist art of the 1970s did not see commonalities between their vision to gain gender equality with their artwork and Beuys's theory of social sculpture, despite the numerous intersections between their work during this period. However, it was precisely because of their shared desire to revolutionize social structures through art that Beuys's ideas found expression among the same generation of feminists making politically conscious public work in the decades that followed. Now

6 Marcia Tucker quoted in feminism panel, "Considering Joseph Beuys" conference, The New School for Social Research, April 6, 1995, cassette recording.

recognized as socially engaged art, the type of work informed by Beuys—either directly by the artists' personal interactions with Beuys, indirectly through the dissemination of his ideas, or through unacknowledged conceptual links to his practice—sought to heal social crises in the United States in the 1980s and 1990s. Examining the artistic practices of a cross section of US feminist artists primarily from the East and West Coasts who made socially engaged art that focused on themes of democratic empowerment, creative development and pedagogy, and ecological activism, I demonstrate that although their methods were principally informed by the work of feminist precursors like Judy Chicago and by feminist consciousness-raising—small group discussions in which they analyzed social and political injustices through their own individual experiences—Beuys's conceptual legacy is also a factor in their work.

"Get Behind and Push"

The reception that Beuys received at his breakfast with the feminist artists and critics is indicative of his interactions with US artists as a whole during this period, many of whom were preoccupied with his persona and cultural difference. Several of the women who had attended reflected on their experience that morning at a panel at the New School in 1995.⁷ Although most had read about Beuys's sculptures and performances,⁸ none were very familiar with his social sculpture projects, such as the Organization for Direct Democracy (ODD; est. 1970), an office that he established in Düsseldorf to educate the public about citizen-initiated referenda, or the Free International University (FIU; est. 1973),

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. Dorothea Rockburne, who does not claim to be a feminist artist, emphasized the influence of his fat and felt installations on her work beginning in the mid-1960s, when she encountered his work in museums in West Germany.

an alternative pedagogic system devoted to developing creativity that was free from state control. From his comments at the breakfast, however, they understood that he was interested in bridging the gap between women's struggles in the United States and those of women in West Germany, which were different in many respects. While Beuys's politics were of central importance to many European artists at this time, his theorization of art as a form of politics did not jibe with the more radicalized politics of feminist artists in the United States. But, as Marcia Tucker later pointed out, even though "his concerns and [the feminists'] concerns didn't mesh [...] they should have, because we all had the feeling that we could bring about actual social change," and, as I would like to show, because their work during this period actually presented several points of commonality with Beuys's.⁹

Beuys had refused to visit the United States prior to 1974, citing his opposition to the US presence in Vietnam. Therefore, feminist artists initially learned about his work through his formidable presence in the art media, particularly following his inclusion in Harald Szeemann's landmark exhibition "Live in Your Head: When Attitudes Become Form" at the Kunsthalle Bern in 1969.¹⁰ Owing to the success of this show—which only included three women among the sixty-nine artists shown—critics in the United States began to follow Beuys's site-specific sculptures and performances, which were often formally compared to the work of US and European artists who emphasized process as for example with Conceptual, Land, and Post-Minimalist art, and Arte Povera. While the establishment of a formal relationship was an important way for artists and critics to understand his

⁹ Tucker, quoted in *ibid.*

¹⁰ "Live in Your Head: When Attitude Becomes Form (Works—Concepts—Processes—Situations—Information)," curated by Harald Szeemann, Kunsthalle Bern, 22 March–27 April 1969; traveled to Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 9 May–15 June 1969; Institute of Contemporary Art, London, 28 August–27 September 1969.

work, such descriptions neglected to provide a suitable context for his practice and therefore obscured the importance of his political activities to European postwar art.¹¹ They did, however, solidify his position within a network of primarily male artists interested in dematerialized work that ran counter to the capitalist circulation of artworks as commodities.

For feminist artists on both coasts of the United States, Beuys was known as one of an international constellation of male Conceptual artists, which in the US included Joseph Kosuth and Sol LeWitt in New York, and Michael Asher and John Baldessari in Los Angeles. These men counted among women artists' teachers and their work dominated the exhibitions they visited and the pages of the art magazines they read. However, Beuys's brand of Conceptualism was somewhat different from his US peers, whose work focused primarily on language. Beuys's practice involved what he called "parallel processes," one part which was shown institutionally and the other typically not: first, his objects, installations, and performances, the form of which was determined by the materials (as in his fat sculptures); and second, his framing of everyday life as a creative experience (social sculpture). This earned him inclusion in several influential publications devoted to Conceptual art that circulated among feminist circles in the United States during the late 1960s and early 1970s, including *Avalanche*, a magazine with nationwide distribution that featured international Post-Minimalist, Post-Studio, and Conceptual artists (including some women) edited by Willoughby Sharp and Liza Béar and published between 1970 and 1976 (Beuys was even featured on the cover

11 Critic Kim Levin reflected on this after his show at the Guggenheim in 1980: "Ten years ago and more, Beuys was an underground name in the United States art world and a hero to art students. His reputation preceded him to this country. When we saw bits and pieces of his work—a felt suit, a silver broom, a blackboard with scrawls—we related it to Oldenburg, to Pop art. When we heard of his use of fat, we thought of our own post-Minimal involvements at the time in nonart materials and informal structure. When he came to New York in 1974 and talked to a coyote in a gallery, we interpreted it in terms of our own performance art. The parallels were misleading." Kim Levin, "Joseph Beuys: The New Order," *Arts Magazine*, April 1980, 154.

of their first issue);¹² the book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1973) by writer, curator, and activist Lucy Lippard, which chronicled international developments in Conceptual art through the perspective of Lippard's involvement with the feminist movement;¹³ as well as interviews and articles on his work in more mainstream art periodicals, such as *ArtNews* and *Artforum*.¹⁴ Much of this coverage was focused on Beuys's more esoteric performances, such as his action *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), rather than his more radicalized political ideas, which had been catalyzed by the West German student movement in June 1967 and involved his participation in the formation of the German Student Party at the Düsseldorf Art Academy the same month. Thus, already by the mid-1970s when he visited the United States, feminist artists viewed him as an established member of the boys' club rather than a revolutionary. In contrast, they were trying to stake their claim outside of the modernist avant-garde by turning away from the trope of the "artist as isolated genius" represented by Beuys and other male artists.

There also appeared to be insurmountable cultural and generational differences between Beuys, who had experienced World War II firsthand, and feminist artists, many of whom were born during or after the war and who had not been involved in combat. They simply did not face the same socio-political or historical circumstances that Beuys did in

12 Beuys was featured in six of the thirteen issues published by Sharp and Béar, reflecting the editors' desire that the magazine have an international scope. He was one of nine artists (only one of whom, Yvonne Rainer, was female) whose portraits donned the cover before it changed to a newspaper format in 1974. See Gwen Allen, *Artists' Magazines: An Alternative Space for Art* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2015), esp. ch. 4.

13 See Lucy R. Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973). The book contains descriptions of *How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* and *Eurasia* in order to explain the symbolism behind his materials, and includes selections from his interviews with Willoughby Sharp and Ursula Meyer about Conceptual art, Marxism, education, and art and the everyday.

14 Early accounts of Beuys's work in the US art media include Willoughby Sharp, "An Interview with Joseph Beuys," *Artforum*, December 1969, 40–47; and Ursula Meyer, "How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare," *ArtNews*, January 1970, 5–57, 71.

West Germany.¹⁵ While Beuys and other left-leaning artists and critics in Europe rallied behind Marxist-oriented student movements and protested US imperialism, younger leftist and activist artists in the United States were more closely aligned with specific protests against the US intervention in Vietnam, racism, and, as in the case of the feminists, sexism. Furthermore, Beuys and the US artist-activists conceived of the relationship between art and politics in different ways. The US artists employed a more pragmatic approach to specific political issues inspired by the philosophy of John Dewey,¹⁶ while Beuys's approach to social problems was more universal and epistemological—he used social sculpture as a totalizing concept under which myriad social issues fell. While Beuys saw art as universal—a method of organizing the social organism as a whole—US artists used their work toward a narrow political aim, often one cause. For them, objects became paramount to their political ideals, whereas for Beuys material products were tangential.¹⁷ Feminist art, particularly in New York and California during the early 1970s, was no exception. It embodied numerous perspectives on a

- 15 Born in 1921, Beuys had trained as a radio operator and a rear gunner in the Nazi Luftwaffe. He never directly discussed this experience in interviews, though it has been researched and recorded in biographies including Hans Peter Riegel, *Beuys: Die Biographie* (Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2013). However, it cannot be proven conclusively that he was a fervent follower of Nazi ideology despite his participation. Beuys's later associations with former Nazis has been an ongoing interest in the media, and while I certainly believe that a discussion of his wartime experience deserves a place in the discourse about the artist, too much emphasis on this period of his life has obscured the artist's mission to heal society after the war in the remaining thirty years of his life.
- 16 See Tom Finkelpearl, introduction to *What We Made: Conversations on Art and Social Cooperation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013); Mary Jane Jacob, *Dewey for Artists* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018); Gregory Sholette, "Dewey, Beuys, Cage and the Vulnerable, yet Utterly Unremarkable Heresy of Socially Engaged Art Education (SEAE)," in *Art as Social Action: An Introduction to the Principles and Practices of Teaching Social Practice Art*, ed. Gregory Sholette, Chloë Bass, and Social Practice Queens (New York: Allworth Press, 2018).
- 17 For Beuys, objects were byproducts of his ideas, performances, and teaching. In an early interview with Willoughby Sharp published in *Artforum*, he reflected on the importance that his role as an educator had on his own artistic practice: "It is my most important function. To be a teacher is my greatest work of art. The rest is the waste product, a demonstration." Beuys quoted in Willoughby Sharp, "An Interview with Joseph Beuys," 44.

unified political cause: equality for women in all aspects of life.¹⁸

Significantly, several of Beuys's students emerged as feminist artists in West Germany in the 1970s, most prominently Ulrike Rosenbach. Because of this, he was likely more familiar with European than US feminism. Characterized mainly by a fight for autonomy and visibility in everyday life and spurred by the student movements of the late 1960s, the West German feminist movement had developed around motherhood as a source of women's empowerment rather than as a justification for subordination.¹⁹ Around the time that Beuys visited the United States for the first time, West German feminists were rallying behind figures like journalist Alice Schwarzer, editor of the feminist journal *Emma*, in defense of the legalization of abortion and promoting the Marxist idea of wages for housewives.²⁰ However, his trip provided him with an opportunity to learn about manifestation of the movement in the United States, where autonomy had been achieved during the war and in the postwar period as women returned to the workplace

- 18 Key texts on feminist art include Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard, eds., *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1994); Lisa Gabrielle Mark, ed., *WACK!: Art and the Feminist Revolution*, exh. cat. (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art, 2007); Helena Reckitt, ed., *Art and Feminism, Themes and Movements* (New York: Phaidon, 2001); Hilary Robinson, ed., *Feminist-Art-Theory: An Anthology, 1968-2000* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001). For a summary of the tenets of second-wave feminist art, see Suzanne Lacy, "The Name of the Game," *Art Journal* 50, no. 2 (1991): 64-68.
- 19 On German feminism, see Barbara Becker-Cantarino, "The Politics of Memory and Gender: What Happened to Second-Wave Feminism in Germany?," *German Life and Letters* 67, no. 4 (2014): 604-15; Myra Marx Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism: German Gender Politics in Global Perspective* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2012). On the grounding of German feminism in issues related to motherhood, see the introduction to Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800-1914*, ACLS Humanities E-Book (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991); Ute Gerhard, Trudie Knijn, and Anja Weckwert, eds., *Working Mothers in Europe: A Comparison of Policies and Practices* (Northampton, MA: Elgar, 2005). See also Ute Gerhard and Ulla Wischermann, eds., *Unhörbar: die Geschichte der deutschen Frauenbewegung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, Germany: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996); Ute Gerhard, *Frauenbewegung und Feminismus eine Geschichte seit 1789* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 2018).
- 20 The latter was part on an international movement in the early 1970s, Wages for Housework, that used Marxist theory to explain the reliance of capitalist economies on the exploitation of labor from marginalized groups. See Louise Toupin, "Le salaire au travail ménager, 1972-1977: retour sur un courant féministe évanoui," *Recherches Féministes, Québec* 29, no. 1 (2016): 179-98.

and equality was of primary concern. The US movement during this time—now called “second-wave” feminism—was characterized by a broad range of issues, including women’s representation, legal rights, and attention to domestic violence and rape.²¹ In many ways, US feminists, who had already been organizing consciousness-raising groups since around 1967–68, paved the way for West German women to create their own networks and spaces, such as women’s centers, newsletters, bookstores, and even art programs, by the mid-1970s.²² In meeting with a group of US feminist artists and critics while in New York, Beuys was demonstrating his own willingness to learn about their ideas and strategies, and their application to the field of art.

Gender-related issues had been a part of Beuys’s political agenda for several years prior to his US visit, particularly through the ODD, a storefront meeting place in Düsseldorf where the public could discuss how to transform West Germany into a more egalitarian society. Placards with slogans such as “Wages for housewives!” and “Genuine freedom for women!” filled the office when it was installed at documenta 5 in summer 1972, in addition to a wall of images of female artists from throughout German history, such as Käthe Kollwitz and Paula Modersohn-Becker. Beuys’s choice to include women and feminist issues in his installation fit with his plan to initiate political action by beginning with those with the least power. The artist was present throughout the duration of the exhibition, and in his conversations with attendees he focused on the equal value of all labor, reflecting the then popular Marxist-feminist strategy

21 Bell hooks has shown that the early second-wave feminist movement, inspired by Betty Friedan’s *The Feminist Mystique*, was instigated by white middle- or upper-class women with little regard to women of color or the poor. Bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984, repr. New York: Routledge, 2015). Attention to the experience of these groups is the hallmark of intersectional feminism.

22 Myra Marx Ferree claims that the United States’ movement was important to the development of West German feminist techniques, such as consciousness-raising, but that their ideological bases differed. Ferree, *Varieties of Feminism*, 53–82.

for including women in the economy based on the idea that their labor was valuable but not recognized or compensated.²³ However, feminism was just one of several issues encompassed within his concept of social sculpture, which generated some frustration among feminists.²⁴ Furthermore, his conversations at documenta (and at his other “public dialogues”) tended more toward a monologue about an array of his own utopian ideals without any practical application, and he only gestured toward collaboration in the establishment of the organization. To US feminists, who valued conversations and dialogue over Beuys’s mono-directional lecturing style, he seemed closer to a “Messianic, Christ-like figure” than an ally,²⁵ and he appeared to trivialize the concerns of women by his lack of recognition of their self-organizing and experimentation, and by establishing them as passive participants in his dialogues. To them, his domineering presence and inability to collaborate with other artists—which had also irritated many Fluxus artists in the early 1960s—confirmed his position in the patriarchal upper echelons of the art world, where many women artists were excluded.

Nonetheless, Beuys shared with feminists their desire to merge political activism with art, leading some to later use his term “social sculpture” to describe their work, as discussed below. Guided by “consciousness-raising” sessions (a name coined by members of the New York Radical Women in 1968) in which they used their personal experiences, such as work, sexuality, or violence, to analyze larger social and political systems of oppression, feminist artists used aesthetic strategies

23 See Clara Bodenmann-Ritter, *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler* (Berlin: Ullstein, 1997).

24 Although Rosenbach later claimed that Beuys resisted feminism, it is more likely that he opposed it being used as a dominant ideology. Kathleen Wentrack, “The Female Body in Conflict: US and European Feminist Performance Art 1963–1979,” Carolee Schneemann, Valle Export, and Ulrike Rosenbach” (PhD diss., City University of New York Graduate Center, 2006), 284.

25 Mary Miss in feminism panel, “Considering Joseph Beuys” conference.

to amplify their ideological concerns by deliberately uniting their social politics with their art.²⁶ Like Beuys, they used the self as a microcosm of larger social structures and believed that personal experience and development could help create social change. However, whereas Beuys's approach focused on the individual, second-wave feminists viewed the individual in terms of the collective.²⁷ They explored the relationship between individual and society by examining the construction of the female voice and body, as well as the spiritual practices of ancient cultures. Feminists investigated pre-Abrahamic religious practices and the concept of Mother Nature because they privileged an essentialist approach to the "feminine" that prized it as a "natural," uniting feature of all women. Beuys had also evoked ancient ritual and referenced universal experience in his shamanistic performances, but as an embodiment of the early twentieth-century anthropologist Rudolf Steiner's concept of spirituality.²⁸

Both the feminists and Beuys also used dialogue in their art, but in different ways. Following Steiner, Beuys promoted dialogue as the tangible expression of thought that could be molded through social sculpture. In contrast, US second-wave feminist artists explored how their voices could be used subversively to explore the roots of female oppression. In order to address a new audience, they focused on forms of dialogue that did not privilege any one interlocutor, employed the media to publicize their issues, and used discursive strategies in their art making, such as conversation, exchange, and networking. Their interactions were much more in line with Beuys's teaching method, in which the artist encouraged a

26 Broude and Garrard, *The Power of Feminist Art*, 21. They were connected to the self-discovery movement of the 1970s and 1980s, during which women were examining their bodies, relationships, careers, and personal experience while at the same time asserting a new position for women within the insular art world.

27 Ibid., 22.

28 See Wolfgang Iser, *Über das Denken bei Joseph Beuys und Rudolf Steiner* (Basel: Wiese, 1995).

two-way dialogue with students, rather than his public dialogues, during which he tended to monopolize the debate in order to express his theories.²⁹ In the classroom, Beuys stressed the importance of developing imagination, intuition, and inspiration (which are ungendered and without a relationship to social equality) through this form of instruction, while feminist art teachers such as Judy Chicago and Miriam Schapiro empowered students to be assertive in reaction to traditional patriarchal teaching methods.³⁰ In order to confront manifestations of power, these feminist pedagogues encouraged students to confront their fears, desires, ambitions, and repressions.³¹ Their discussions and work were based on consciousness-raising sessions in which their personal experiences were analyzed and then formulated into response-based art.³² The supportive environments of the consciousness-raising groups were spaces where women could engage in reflexive activities while expressing themselves to others, thereby creating a new form of collective awareness.³³

29 A good example of this can be found in Bodenmann-Ritter, *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler*, which provides a transcription of Beuys's interactions with visitors to the Office of the ODD at documenta 5 in summer 1972. Beuys is prompted to discuss subjects by the visitors, but monopolizes most of the conversations with his own ideas. His public dialogues, like those in the United States, typically began with one or more hours of Beuys presenting his ideas to a crowd, followed by more of a question-and-answer session with the audience rather than a true two-way discussion in which the questioners' opinions and ideas are also taken into account.

30 Student Faith Wilding said, "[Chicago] felt that women students were either ignored or coddled by most male professors and that we needed to learn to be assertive, to express our anger, to make demands on ourselves and others, and to identify and ask for what we needed. The group process made fundamental demands on us to analyze and change our traditional gender roles, which often caused psychological turmoil, and emotional explosions." Wilding quoted in "The Feminist Art Programs at Fresno and CalArts, 1970-1975," in *The Power of Feminist Art*, 35.

31 Ibid.

32 Some of the work revolved around Chicago's concept of "central core imagery," or images of female sexual organs, while others were experimentations with non-traditional art media and methods of production. For example, in Faith Wilding's account, in order to "explode the hierarchies of materials and high/low art practices," the Feminist Art Program (FAP) used materials as various as tampons, artificial flowers, makeup, glitter, blood, and animal organs, while their collective and collaborative way of producing work undermined the modernist legacy of the individual artist genius. Ibid.

33 Géraldine Gourbe, "The Pedagogy of Art as Agency: Or the Influence of a West Coast Feminist Art Program on an East Coast Pioneering Reflection on Performance Art," in *Composing Differences: Imagining New Models for Knowledge Production and Exchange*, ed. Virginie Bobin (Paris: Les presses du réel, 2015), 10.

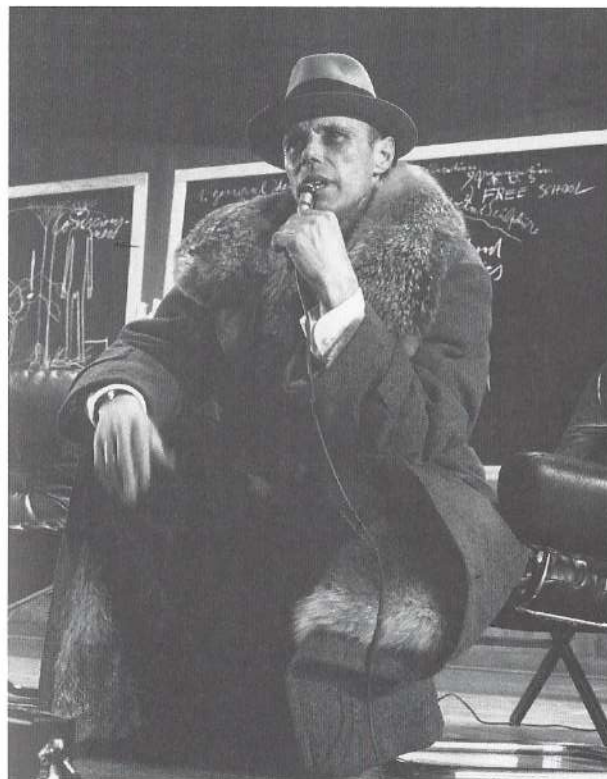
Beuys, on the other hand, had a reputation for marathon public lectures and the ritualistic tone of his performances often prompted critics in the United States, the feminists included, to characterize him as a cultlike figure.³⁴

Few US feminists may have been aware of Beuys prior to his arrival in 1974, but their strong reaction to him after that time was no doubt informed by the lecture tour that he gave in January of that year (his return several months later to perform the now-iconic three-day action *I Like America and America Likes Me* with a live coyote at the René Block Gallery was sparsely attended and went nearly unnoticed in the press).³⁵ On January 11, 1974, Beuys gave his first of many public discussions on the subject of social sculpture in New York at the New School for Social Research in front of a packed audience that included numerous art world luminaries, including Douglas Davis, Philip Glass, Al Hansen, Claes Oldenburg, Lil Picard, Willoughby Sharp, and Holly Solomon, many of whom had come because they had heard a bit about his sculptures or performances but were generally unfamiliar with the theories behind his work.³⁶ Beuys

34 This interpretation emerged at the same time as the anti-cult movement was gaining support in the United States, and thus his reception among feminists might also be seen in light of opposition to leaders such as Charles Manson, who had gained notoriety in 1969 after he attracted a group of mostly young female followers to commit a series of murders (he was sentenced in 1971).

35 This action took place at the René Block Gallery in New York on May 23–25, 1974. Uwe M. Schneede, *Joseph Beuys, die Aktionen: Kommentiertes Werkverzeichnis mit fotografischen Dokumentationen* (Ostfildern-Ruit bei Stuttgart: Verlag Gerd Hatje, 1994), 330. Block claims that none of the VIP guests who were invited, such as museum curators, critics, or even other dealers in SoHo, managed to attend. René Block, interview by author, Berlin, January 29, 2016. It was reported on several months later in Edit de Ak and Walter Robinson, "Beuys: Art Encagé," *Art in America*, December 1974, 75; Joseph Dreiss, "Joseph Beuys," *Arts Magazine*, September 1974; Roberta Smith, "Joseph Beuys," *Artforum*, September 1974, 74–75.

36 De Ak and Robinson, "Beuys: Art Encagé," 77. The talk was captured on video, which was shown the next day at 112 Greene Street, an artist-run gallery in SoHo known for showing avant-garde work at this time; a transcript was later published in *Avalanche* and then later, in 1990, in Carin Kuoni's book *Joseph Beuys in America*, discussed below. See *Joseph Beuys' Public Dialogue at the New School, New York*, directed by Willoughby Sharp (New York: Monday/Wednesday/Friday Video Club, 1974), 120 min, b&w, sound, Electronic Arts Intermix, New York, <https://www.eai.org/titles/joseph-beuys-public-dialogue> [also available on YouTube]; Joseph Beuys, "Joseph Beuys [...] Public Dialogue," *Avalanche Newspaper*, June 1974, 5–7; Joseph Beuys, "A Public Dialogue, New York, 1974," in Kuoni, *Joseph Beuys in America*, 25–37.



Beuys at the New School for Social Research, January 11, 1974. Photo © Cosmos; courtesy of Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

delivered his dialogue from a large leather chair placed on stage, looking very regal in a large fur-trimmed coat and his signature felt fedora. Following an extended discussion of social sculpture in clumsy English with some interpretation by British critic Caroline Tisdall, the artist invited audience members to join him on stage to ask questions and engage in a conversation that lasted nearly three hours. Although his lectures had been well received, if not celebrated, across Europe up until this point, his New York engagement quickly

unraveled as members of the audience demonstrated hostility to his demeanor and his inability to clearly delineate his seemingly utopian conception of art.³⁷

Feminist artists were particularly troubled by Beuys's display. While he was on stage, artist Hannah Wilke approached to ask about the diagrams Beuys had drawn on his blackboards, which illustrated the difference between plants (which either regenerate themselves or die) and man (who is conscious and has a soul).³⁸ Video documentation of the event shows that she drew attention to the fact that Beuys had only included male consciousness, freedom, and spirituality by representing this concept with a figure with a phallus and that this form of consciousness did not include male-female bodily interactions.³⁹ Wilke interpreted that Beuys's new form of art brought people together, but that it also elided female consciousness. Beuys's response to her assessment shattered any communion between social sculpture and feminist art. He stated that social sculpture was broad enough to encompass feminist problems like power inequality between sexes—which he addressed through the ODD—but that feminism was her concern, not his. His performance the next day at the breakfast hosted at his hotel did little to prove that he supported the feminists' cause. Following his brief introduction at the breakfast, Mary Miss later recalled that Faith Ringgold had declared, "We don't need a leader, Mr. Beuys. If you want to do something, get behind and push," then turned and presented him with her rear end.⁴⁰ Lucy Lippard was aggravated by his suggestion that they create a registry of women artists, which feminists had already done, while Brenda Miller said that Beuys

37 The event received widespread negative criticism in the US art media. See Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, "Public Dialogue with Joseph Beuys," *Artforum*, March 1974, 69; April Kingsley, "New York Letter," *Art International*, March 1974, 48–50; and de Ak and Robinson, "Beuys: Art Encagé."

38 Unlike many of Beuys's other blackboards, these were erased at the end of the dialogue. Staeck and Steidl, *Beuys in America*, 7.

39 See *Joseph Beuys' Public Dialogue at the New School, New York*.

40 Mary Miss quoted in feminism panel, "Considering Joseph Beuys" conference.



Hannah Wilke and Joseph Beuys at the New School for Social Research, January 11, 1974.
Photo © Peggy Jarrell Kaplan; courtesy of Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

seemed to have gathered the women because he thought he could get them as his supporters, but he was shocked to find that they didn't respond that way.⁴¹

While there are several factors that contributed to feminist artists' aversion to Beuys during this time period, perhaps the strongest was his persona, which he had developed in the early 1960s. In 1964, while he was still performing in Fluxus events, Beuys had compiled an idiosyncratic curriculum vitae titled *Lebenslauf/Werklauf* (Life Course/Work Course), which he later expanded to include the story of a (true) plane crash in the Crimea in March 1944 and his (fabricated) salvation by a nomadic group of Tartars who supposedly wrapped his body in fat and felt.⁴² This tale was given credence by the appearance of these materials in his artwork. "The Story," as it has come to be known,⁴³ is generally recognized as a strategy Beuys used to navigate his personal experience of trauma during the Second World War and to create a metaphor for healing society at large.⁴⁴ He added to this self-mythology by dressing in costume—a felt hat (worn to cover up his actual war wounds), a fishing vest, and jeans—which made him instantly recognizable. Furthermore, he consistently stirred

41 Ibid.

42 Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, and Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys, Life and Works* (Woodbury, NY: Barron's Educational Series, 1979), 5.

43 See Peter Nisbet, "Crash Course," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy* (New York: DAP, 2001), 5–17.

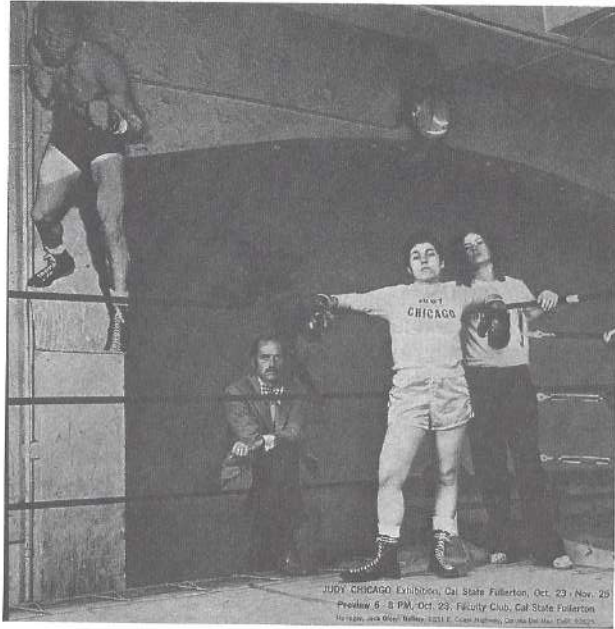
44 As Claudia Mesch has convincingly argued, because Beuys's art dealt with the reconstitution of the self, following the violence of the Second World War from the position of a German soldier, he presents an ethically ambiguous position that many critics, particularly men of his generation, found (and still find) particularly problematic. Rather than examining this persona as a means for Beuys to explore his own subjectivity, relationship to the past, or German society's negotiation of memory, some have viewed it as a reflection of his self-absorption, self-promotion, or worse, that he is a charlatan for claiming victimhood during wartime when in reality he was among the perpetrators. Whereas for Germans this position may have, according to Mesch, been a means for them to relieve frustrations with older generations, for Americans such a critique reveals ongoing tensions with Germans as a historical enemy. This was not a position solely reserved for feminists, although gauging by their response to the breakfast meeting in January 1974, it dominated their critical backlash and overshadowed his genuine interest in their cause. See Claudia Mesch, *Joseph Beuys* (London: Reaktion Books, 2017), 21.

public interest with a seemingly never-ending series of contradictions, such as his ability to simultaneously criticize consumerism while at the same time driving around in a Rolls Royce and wearing an extravagant fur coat, as he had done in New York. Beuys was a known provocateur who reveled in the discussions brought on by these inconsistencies—though for many they presented insurmountable obstacles to his work and ideas.

The creation of a persona was certainly not new to the field of art, nor was it the first time that an artist had used one as a medium of both art and politics.⁴⁵ However, for Beuys, whose career trajectory dovetailed with the rise of the artist as a celebrity and the internationalization of the art market, the persona was more than an alter ego; it was a conflation of his art and his personality.⁴⁶ Beuys inhabited and performed this role throughout his life as a means of attracting attention for his political platform and also for garnering commissions that would financially support his more ephemeral projects. Like the German literary figure Heinrich Böll, Beuys used the mass media to intervene in public debates and foster critical dialogue, serving as a spokesperson for antiauthoritarian views on television and in the newspapers and gaining new audiences through publicity events and news conferences. For Beuys, the media was just another forum in which to talk about how the public might exercise its freedom, one of the hallmarks of his artistic philosophy. However, his use of the media and his

45 A notable example was invented by Marcel Duchamp, whose purported rejection of the art world to play chess in 1923 was a known source of frustration for Beuys. Beginning around the same time, in the 1920s, Duchamp created a female alter ego, *Rose Sélavy*, to whom he attributed artworks and writings throughout his career. With a name that referenced eroticism and beauty ("Eros, c'est la vie"), this gender-bending character embodied the artist's playful experiments with language and symbolism.

46 Soojin Lee defines this type of artist-persona as "a concrete but unstable body-image and a performative interface between a person's (internal) subjectivity and (external) identity which can reveal the complicated relations among performance, representation, and perception of those artists who have become symbolic figures in contemporary culture." Soojin Lee, "The Art and Politics of Artists' Personas: The Case of Yayoi Kusama," *Persona Studies* 1, no. 1 (2015): 29.



Judy Chicago as a Boxer, advertisement announcing her show at Cal State Fullerton, 1970. Published in *Artforum*, December 1970, 36. Photo by Jerry McMillan. © 2019 Judy Chicago / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

own celebrity status was also deeply unsettling for many in the art world, including feminist artists.

Notwithstanding, Beuys's use of a persona to promote his causes is not entirely unlike that of the pioneering West Coast feminist artist Judy Chicago, who legally changed her surname from Gerowitz, inherited from her late husband, to Chicago, her hometown, in 1970. Based on a nickname used by her former art dealer, the name change reflected her independence from "male social dominance."⁴⁷ She celebrated with an advertisement in the December 1970 issue

⁴⁷ Gail Levin, *Becoming Judy Chicago: A Biography of the Artist* (New York: Harmony Books, 2007), 2. Her sources of inspiration were French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, African American abolitionist Sojourner Truth, and English novelist George Eliot (the latter two of whom had changed their names as well).

of *Artforum* in which she is depicted as a tough-looking boxer sporting closely cropped hair, boxing trunks, and a sweatshirt brandishing her new name. Chicago, like Beuys, used the opportunity to inhabit a new, empowered role that reflected her renewed relationship with society and embodied her desire to critique its structures. While this tactic had long been used by male artists to establish themselves and increase sales, for Chicago, it represented a way of seizing power in an area where women artists previously had none.

It is unlikely that Chicago and Beuys ever met, but the two artists might be compared in other ways, as well, for both had particularly strong, persuasive personalities and both were known as teachers with a loyal following of students. Chicago was the founder of the Feminist Art Program, first at Fresno State College and later at California Institute of the Arts, which in the early 1970s attracted students and teachers well known in West Coast feminist art, including Miriam Schapiro, Suzanne Lacy, Faith Wilding, Sheila Levrant de Brettville, and Arlene Raven. Like Beuys, Chicago was energetic and charismatic and was also heavily influenced by the student movements of the late 1960s. Following one of the tenets of second-wave feminism, Chicago also engaged in historical revision by resurrecting the female perspective and experience, "feminine" forms, and art-making methods in art and art history, even going so far as to pen two editions of her own autobiography about her struggles as a female artist.⁴⁸ While Beuys stressed the importance of developing anthroposophic concepts of imagination, intuition, and inspiration in both his classroom and his political projects, Chicago focused on female empowerment and assertiveness as a reaction to traditional

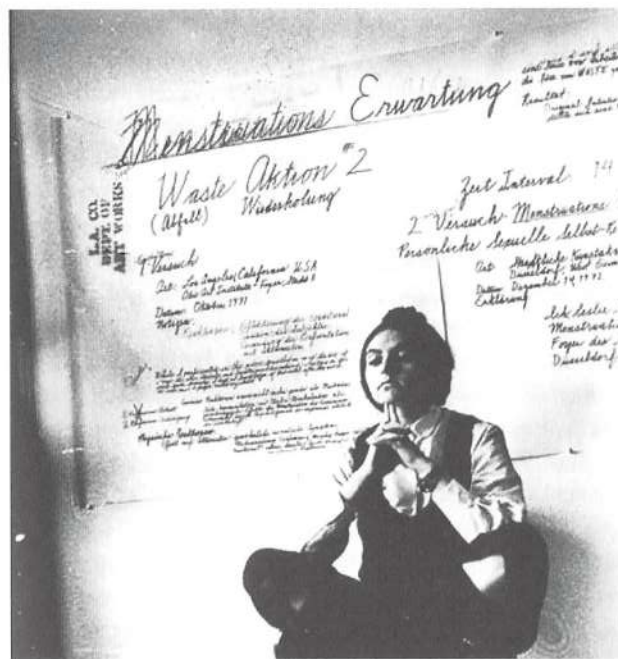
⁴⁸ Judy Chicago, *Through the Flower: My Struggle as a Woman Artist* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1975); Judy Chicago, *Beyond the Flower: The Autobiography of a Feminist Artist* (New York: Penguin, 1996).

patriarchal teaching methods. Her classroom discussions were based on the format of consciousness-raising sessions. And unlike Beuys, she was unwavering in her devotion to the feminist cause.

Neglecting any similarities between her and Beuys's approaches, Chicago turned down Leslie Labowitz (later Labowitz-Starus), her student, when she requested a letter of recommendation to study with Beuys at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in 1971, citing her disdain for the patriarchal nature of German society.⁴⁹ At the time, Labowitz was producing artwork that was influenced by feminism, such as *Menstruation Wait*, a performance in which she confronted the social stigma associated with this female biological process by expressing the physical and emotional effects she felt while literally waiting for her period. Despite Chicago's lack of support, Labowitz went to West Germany anyway (she was perhaps the only US feminist artist to study in Düsseldorf during Beuys's tenure) but was unable to work with Beuys, who had just been fired from the Düsseldorf Art Academy for his controversial teaching methodology and political organizing.⁵⁰ He attended her restaging of the performance in Düsseldorf and motivated her to consider how art could be used to initiate social change more broadly. He also suggested that her feminist art projects—including a video group she established with his former students Rosenbach and Maria Fisahn, and the collaborative street performances in which she participated in Bonn in the mid-1970s—could be a conduit to the spiritual world. Like other artists in the United States who were interested in Beuys's work in the early 1970s, Labowitz was drawn to the

⁴⁹ Leslie Labowitz-Starus, telephone conversation with the author, February 18, 2015.

⁵⁰ She wrote to Beuys to express her own interest in teaching and to invite him to lecture and produce work in Los Angeles. Beuys declined her invitation, but he supported her work nonetheless, so he wrote her a recommendation for a Fulbright Grant at the Düsseldorf Art Academy in 1972. Leslie Labowitz, letter to Joseph Beuys, August 10, 1971, JBA-B 027291, Joseph Beuys Archiv, Museum Schloß Moyland, Bedburg-Hau, Germany.



Leslie Labowitz, *Menstruation Wait*, Düsseldorf Art Academy, 1972. Image courtesy of Leslie Labowitz-Starus.

dematerialized, conceptual, performative, and shamanistic aspects of Beuys's practice, as well as his ability to attract large crowds and media attention. But she struggled to connect his concepts to her feminist ideals, and her proposal for a Women Artists Center as a part of the FIU went unrealized.⁵¹ In West Germany, feminist artists still received little support and traditional notions of the family prevailed. Instead, she focused her energies on demonstrating

⁵¹ Leslie Labowitz, letter to Joseph Beuys, June 25, 1973, JBA-B 014741, Joseph Beuys Archiv, Museum Schloß Moyland, Bedburg-Hau, Germany. Several years later, Ulrike Rosenbach began her own school in Cologne (unrelated to Beuys's), the Schule für Kreativen Feminismus (School for Creative Feminism; 1976–82). Kathleen Wentrack, "Heterotopian Spaces of Feminist Art Practice: The Schule Für Kreativen Feminismus and the Stichting Vrouwen in de Beeldende Kunst," in *All-Women Art Spaces in Europe in the Long 1970s*, ed. Agata Jakubowska and Katy Deepwell (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).

in support of the legalization of abortion and street performances exposing women's roles in the home.⁵²

Labowitz returned to Los Angeles in 1977 to work in the Woman's Building (1973–91), where she met Suzanne Lacy.⁵³ The two collaborated on several politically charged performances protesting violence against women in the late 1970s, stylized after guerrilla theater and performed in public spaces. They also called their own news conferences and employed their audiences as participants in their actions, just as Beuys had done for his social sculptures during the same period, but instead directed at a feminist cause. For *In Mourning and in Rage* (1977), Labowitz and Lacy organized a demonstration to counter the sensationalized media coverage of the Hillside Stranger, a serial rapist and murderer terrorizing Los Angeles. Alongside collaborators from the city council and rape support groups, the artists marched on the steps of City Hall in tall black mourning robes, similar to those Labowitz had used in protests in Germany, to address newspaper journalists and TV broadcasters about violence against women and to empower women to fight back. Lacy and Labowitz continued their collaboration by founding Ariadne: A Social Art Network, a coalition of artists, activists, reporters, and politicians designed to structure their activism, to provide a power base to approach the media, and to apply for funding.⁵⁴ They conceived the group as a conceptual project, comparable to the ODD, in that it provided the space for others to explore ideas in addition to presenting Lacy and Labowitz's own work. They also attracted like-minded individuals and educated the public on

⁵² Labowitz-Starus, telephone conversation with author, February 18, 2015. Labowitz-Starus took part in protests alongside West German feminists in defense of the legalization of abortion and the reform of §218 of the West German constitution.

⁵³ By this time, Lacy was aware of Beuys's performances, and she considers him one of many artists who influenced her practice during the 1970s.

⁵⁴ Labowitz and Lacy have developed a web archive of their activities as an educational tool for social practice artists, pedagogues, and activists: Leslie Labowitz-Starus and Suzanne Lacy, "Ariadne: A Social Art Network, 1977–1982," Ariadne, accessed December 8, 2018, <https://www.againstviolence.art/>.

feminist-related topics, such as political performance and media representation, through workshops and lectures. However, the project functioned more collaboratively than Beuys's. By including and promoting the writings, suggestions, and performances of members in their activities, they were using individual experience to analyze structural inequality, the primary goal of consciousness-raising.

By the close of the 1970s, many artist-activists had abandoned such radical forms of intervention. Some turned away from the art world or began to think of art in expanded terms—Labowitz herself began farming sprouts to sell at local markets as part of her performance practice—while others, like Lacy, sought out new methods of engaging audiences in their artwork. It was not until the late 1980s, as the second-wave turned to third-wave feminism and the movement began to embrace individualism and diversity, that second-wave feminist artists' aversion to Beuys's persona and patronizing attitude wore off. Although they had been combining their activism and art practice using techniques inspired by precursors like Chicago and consciousness-raising for some time, Beuys nonetheless emerged as a reference for second-wave artists dealing with social crises brought on and exacerbated by the conservative neoliberal policies of the Reagan administration. His brand of spiritualism employed art as a homeopathic approach to healing, which was in line with feminist artists' desire to combat the overzealous market tendencies while attending directly to people's needs.

Beuys and Socially Engaged Art in the United States

In the 1980s, social and economic infrastructure deficits brought on by Ronald Reagan's two-term presidency (1980–84 and 1985–89) reignited artists' interest in the therapeutic use of art, particularly as government defunding of the

arts pushed artists to seek out new audiences and funding sources.⁵⁵ Feminist artists, in particular, took a leading role in the creation and evolution of these new approaches by directly attending to social issues in the public realm, although not necessarily in direct response to Beuys's political ideas. Rather, their work can be seen as closely aligned with social sculpture because they were similarly dedicated to social transformation and the empowerment of the participants in their projects, which took a holistic and interdisciplinary approach to politics. Artists such as Judy Baca, Martha Rosler, and Mary Miss have considered the individual's relationship to the larger social system through their collaborations with city officials, other professionals, activist groups, and members of the public, and their establishment of spaces for the public to learn and share resources. Although we might now call their work socially engaged, in 1995 Lacy grouped these projects under the term "new genre public art."⁵⁶ For her and others making this kind of work, they were not merely *representing* politics, they were using education, conversation, and performance to directly address problems such as AIDS, domestic and state violence, homelessness, and environmental destruction. In what follows, I propose three second-wave

55 Only two weeks into his first term, Reagan announced what came to be known as the "Reagan Revolution": a cutback in government spending that drastically affected federally funded agencies and an emphasis on supply-side economics. Programs that helped the poor, disabled, and elderly—such as Social Security, food stamps, and Medicaid—were reduced, leaving many in worse situations than before. During his second term, banking was deregulated and federal agencies such as the Civil Rights Commission, Environmental Protection Agency, and the Equal Opportunity Employment Opportunity Commission saw massive budget cuts as well as the appointment of conservative administrators whose views were at odds with the missions of their organizations. Moreover, when Reagan came to power, he brought with him a small elite group of neoconservatives who used their energy and power to reverse welfare state initiatives, to call for increased national defense and anti-communist strategy in foreign policy, to advocate less government intervention in economic markets, and to emphasize their belief that social problems could be solved through culture rather than politics. This resulted in the concentration of wealth and power among companies and a group of elite individuals, an increase in inequality between social and economic classes (and between racial groups), and the exacerbation of social crises such as homelessness. Robert M. Collins, *Transforming America: Politics and Culture in the Reagan Years* (New York: Columbia University, 2007), 47.

56 See Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995).

feminist artists making work during the period of the third wave who demonstrate both a direct and indirect conceptual alignment with Beuys: Lacy, whose own practice demonstrates an affinity with Beuys's dedication to the principle of direct democracy; Dorit Cypis, whose work embodies a commitment to creative development and pedagogy; and Mierle Laderman Ukeles, whose ecological projects are aligned with Beuys's environmental activism.

Given Beuys's initial negative reception in the United States and the plethora of artist-activists that emerged across the country in the 1970s, it is unsurprising that female artists like Cypis, Lacy, and Ukeles looked to domestic sources of inspiration rather than toward social sculpture during this period. Indeed, US artists paid little attention to Beuys's philosophy until the mid-1980s, when artists and critics—feminist and otherwise—began reacting to the hypertrophied art market. Suzi Gablik, an artist who had turned to criticism, had great impact in this area. In her book *Has Modernism Failed?* (1984), Gablik argues that the advent of postmodernism at this time—both in its emphases on aesthetic pluralism and on identity as a social construct—paradoxically did not offer more opportunities for creative freedom. Rather, it had established a false sense of complexity that covered up its lack of meaning.⁵⁷ She implored artists to recommit themselves to a social purpose and proposed Beuys as an example of an artist who reinvested art with ancient values as a means of communicating with the spiritual world, connecting with creative energies, and making meaningful connections between art and peoples' lives.⁵⁸ In so doing, Gablik established Beuys as a model for how society could merge traditional and modern values and how artists could enact cultural resistance by engaging directly

57 Suzi Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed?* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004), 21–22.

58 *Ibid.*, 134.

with the public—a model that was also being independently taken up by feminists and other artist-activists interested in social justice during this decade.

Gablik's call coincided with the nationwide growth of community-driven, interactive public art inspired by the increasing distrust for art that did not directly address social issues or represent residents' visions of their own communities. After several direct attacks on public artworks—notably Richard Serra's *Tilted Arc* (1981–89) in New York—local communities were increasingly included in the planning and execution of proposed public art projects. As an outgrowth of this, artists gained more skills in mediation, and interdisciplinary dialogue and pedagogy became more prominent aspects of their work. These had been a part of feminist art training since the early 1970s, but the latter two in particular had also been key components of Beuys's philosophy. This new crop of artist-activists, including Cypis, Lacy, and Ukeles, also believed that art should expose and heal social and ecological injustice and that in order to address these issues they needed to experiment with nontraditional mediums.⁵⁹ They also wanted to make the process of production a visible part of the work itself, as in Beuys's social sculpture projects.

This period also saw the advent of third-wave feminism in response to postmodern theory. Less activist and organization oriented than the preceding generation, feminists of the third wave also differed from the second in their emphases on identity formation, which as Maria Elena Buszek says, “[led these] women to theorize and practice an individual

59 This type of work had a long history in the United States that was linked to participatory practice and art activism and included precursors cited by many second-wave feminists, such as Allan Kaprow and Judy Chicago on the West Coast and the Art Workers Coalition on the East. Already in its second or third generation during the Reagan era, these artists drew on their experience and skills in community organizing learned either through directly participating (or learning from teachers who had participated) in countercultural activity of the 1960s and 1970s, including Women's Liberation, but also the civil rights and anti-war movements. Suzanne Lacy, *Mapping the Terrain*, 30; Arlene Raven, ed., *Art in the Public Interest* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993), 4.

feminist politics expressed more subtly in everyday-life actions.⁶⁰ The third wave also emphasized intersectionality, the idea that race and class are also layers of oppression in addition to gender discrimination, disputing the second-wave conceptualization of women as a homogeneous category who shared the same life experiences.⁶¹ Crucially, this later generation lacked an immediate memory of Beuys's early interactions with feminists, and therefore feminist artists working during this period were more open to his ideas and how it applied to gender equality in broader terms of identity construction. Artists who trained during the third wave, such as Barbara Kruger and Cindy Sherman, focused on identity deconstruction through objects and images. Others, including many second-wave feminist artists who continued to work in this period, tended more toward socially engaged art, transforming the consciousness-raising group into a dialogic work of art. Rather than making artwork that served one political ideal—as feminist artists had done in the past—this new form of socially engaged feminist art addressed a number of issues simultaneously, not only the visibility of women, but also other marginalized groups such as racial and ethnic minorities; media literacy; and the crises that had been exacerbated by the neoconservative government, including homelessness and environmental degradation.

Feminist artists making socially engaged art in the 1980s shared with Beuys the optimistic belief that art could play a role in shaping society for the better. Like Beuys, they were

60 Introduction to Maria Elena Buszek, *Pin-up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, Popular Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 18–19. Buszek also describes the value of differentiating between generations of feminists by “waves” versus other genealogical models because the waves can help understand the various paradoxes that faced and sustained the movement over time.

61 Bell hooks's 1984 text was formative to this development, hooks, *Feminist Theory*. Law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw is credited with the first use of “intersectionality” as a term in 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 139 (1989), <https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/uclf/vol1989/iss1/8/>.

convinced that art could be used to inspire individual creativity and therefore change society from within. As critic Kim Levin has convincingly argued, perhaps the most influential part of Beuys's practice in the United States has been his therapeutic use of art.⁶² She links Beuys to a growing interest in therapeutic culture in the United States (particularly on the West Coast) since the late 1960s, which is focused on the self as an organizing and healing principle and can be seen as a conscious rejection of materialism.⁶³ Followers of this movement would have been particularly drawn to Beuys's practice of Steinerian homeopathy, which is based on the principle of healing "like with like," a phrase that the artist often invoked when speaking of the metaphoric principles of his own work. In contrast to the tendency in political art in which the artist criticizes social problems from a distance, Beuys attempted to use art as a means for social change by holistically addressing problems from within and employing a number of disciplines at the same time.

Though they may not have referred to it as such, there were a number of feminist artists who used similar acts of homeopathy to heal social ills created by the deficits in social and economic infrastructure in US cities during the presidencies of Reagan and his equally conservative successor, George H. W. Bush (1989–93). Their work directly and practically intervenes in public affairs with the aim of "broadening awareness for underrepresented groups or issues and affecting societal or policy change. Pertinent examples include the Guerilla Girls (est. 1985), who used a media strategy derived from advertising to combat the representation of women; Adrian Piper, whose confrontational

62 Kim Levin, "Some Neglected Bequests," in *Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy*, 179–80.

63 This movement is characterized by what historian Robert M. Collins calls "expressive individualism," or the focus on individual feelings and expressions over communal resources. Psychologists such as Martin E. P. Seligman noted that this rise in individualism, often marked by an anti-materialism and a drive toward self-reflection, coincided with a loss of faith in social institutions. Collins, *Transforming America*, 152–53.

performances involving public participation attacked racial stereotypes; and Martha Rosler, who identified the causes of displacement of the residents of New York City and offered solutions, including design options and onsite counseling.

Lacy is one such artist who combined her feminist beliefs with methodologies she gained from social activism in her aesthetic practice. Unlike Labowitz, Lacy never met Beuys and, as a student of Allan Kaprow and Judy Chicago, she justifiably focuses on the influence of happenings and consciousness-raising on her later community-based practice rather than that of social sculpture.⁶⁴ Labowitz was Lacy's closest encounter with the German artist during her emerging career—and she was arguably indirectly influenced by Labowitz's incorporation of Beuys's media tactics and spiritual principles in their collaborative performances. She also encountered Beuys's work through Fluxus artists who had been involved in performances with Beuys in Germany in the early 1960s, such as Alison Knowles; Beuys's students Rosenbach and Katharina Sieverding, who lectured at CalArts in Valencia and the Woman's Building in Los Angeles (where Lacy was a part of the Feminist Studio Workshop) in 1976–77;⁶⁵ and through the catalogue for his solo exhibition at the Solomon R. Guggenheim in 1979–80, which circulated in artist circles in California.⁶⁶ While Lacy has expressed an interest in Beuys's media tactics and his use of art to critique social and political structures, it is my contention that her approach to politics through aesthetics demonstrates a conceptual link

64 On Lacy's influences, which also include Saul Alinsky and George Gerbner, see Lacy, "The Name of the Game," 64.

65 Rosenbach performed at the Woman's Building on April 29, 1976. Terry Wolverton, "Woman's Building: History Timeline," Otis College of Art and Design, 2011, <https://www.otis.edu/old-ben-maltz-gallery/womans-building-history-timeline>. Although Suzanne Lacy and Dorit Cypis corroborate Sieverding's CV, which notes that she lectured at CalArts in 1976–77, CalArts' archives contain no records of the talk.

66 Suzanne Lacy, interview by author, Los Angeles, CA, April 2, 2015. Lacy recalls that she encountered the catalogue, which was circulating among artists in the Los Angeles area after the exhibition in the early 1980s. See Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, exh. cat. (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1979).

between her practice and social sculpture. Like the concepts espoused in the ODD, Lacy emphasizes democratic empowerment as a means to achieve broader social transformation.

Following her collaboration with Labowitz, in the early 1980s Lacy established a working model that she began to employ in her short-term socially engaged projects around Los Angeles, the San Francisco Bay Area, and, later, elsewhere around the United States and abroad. Recognizing the transformative power of conversation, she has organized workshops, mentorship programs, and large public performances on topics as diverse as teen violence, sexual assault, and aging. She examines these issues using a series of events over a period of several months prior to the production of a culminating performance, in which small group discussions are framed as art. These performances are staged with the help of paid staff, volunteers, and performers—usually women from a broad range of races, ethnicities, economic classes, ages, and abilities—with whom she forges relationships through their participation in the classes and through social gatherings such as dinners. In the 1980s, Lacy also began to deal with media theory more closely by teaching workshops that addressed issues of representation and by incorporating film, video, audio, printed documents, and press conferences into her performances. While her audience was already quite large, these mediums further expanded her constituency and attracted more media coverage.

A relevant early example of this model is the well-known piece *The Crystal Quilt*, a performance that was part of her *Whisper Minnesota Project* (1985–87) in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Over the course of three years, Lacy held a lecture series, film screenings, and a mass media campaign to address the representation of aging women in the United States. Her research process culminated in a large-scale performance set in the atrium of a shopping center, where 430 black-clad women, organized around tables with red and



Suzanne Lacy with Sharon Roe Anderson, Nancy Dennis, Judy Kepes, Phyllis Jane Rose, and Phyllis Salzberg, *The Crystal Quilt*, Minneapolis, MN, 1987. Photo by Ann Marsden.

yellow tablecloths in a large quadratic area to form the pattern of a quilt, performed synchronized movements to prerecorded sounds (stories told by the women mixed with commentary about the potential of the elderly) for an audience of several thousand.⁶⁷ While there is no denying that Chicago, Schapiro (one of her collaborators on this piece), and Kaprow influenced Lacy in the form and content of this work—particularly in the stage direction, quilt motif of the performance, and feminist theme—a parallel can be seen between this temporary, staged event and Beuys's efforts to combine his pedagogic methodology with performance art. Both artists were interested in individual experience as a metaphor for larger social issues, though expressed in different ways—Lacy employed smaller conversations informed by her experience with consciousness-raising, while Beuys organized FIU workshops concerning a wide array of topics such as nuclear energy, urban decay, and violence. Beuys's focus on

⁶⁷ "The Crystal Quilt," Suzanne Lacy, accessed January 15, 2019, <http://www.suzannelacy.com/early-works/#/the-crystal-quilt/>.

interdisciplinarity also relates to Lacy, who relied on the skills of collaborators outside of her own discipline such as councilors, public officials, and theater managers to both attract participants and aid with the practical implementation of her ideas. And despite Lacy's more recent attempts to reinscribe authorship to past collaborators, Lacy and Beuys are each received as the central author of their projects, reinforced by their critical writing, museum exhibitions featuring performance ephemera, and ubiquitous presence in documentary photos of their performances. While this certainly points to a more common desire in the art field for attribution, it also reveals that singular authorship was perhaps as vital for this generation of feminists as it had been for Beuys.

It wasn't until Bush's term in the early 1990s that there was a concerted effort by critics to rehabilitate Beuys's reputation and feminist artists began to claim him as a precedent to their work. The transformation in the reception of Beuys's thought in the United States was also no doubt aided by the artist's death in 1986, for Beuys was no longer present to obscure his message, thus mitigating the impact of his contentious persona and leading to an increased emphasis on the content of his work.⁶⁸ At this time, several publications on Beuys began to appear in English, initially with the book *Joseph Beuys in America: Energy Plan for the Western Man* (1990), edited by art critic and curator Karin Kuoni, which contains transcripts of several of his lectures.⁶⁹ The same year, curator Mary Jane Jacob established

68 According to Kim Levin, during his lifetime Beuys exerted much control over the dissemination of image of his work, which prevented art critics and art historians from publishing books on him. Levin, "Some Neglected Bequests," 177.

69 Kuoni, *Joseph Beuys in America*. Many of the publications on Beuys from this period rely heavily on the artist's own words to explain his work or draw on undocumented personal anecdotes from the author's relationship with Beuys, rather than providing clarity to his ideas or work for an English-language readership. See also Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991); Götz Adriani, Winfried Konertz, and Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys* (1979; repr. Cologne: Dumont Buchverlag, 1994); Alain Borer and Lothar Schirmer, *The Essential Joseph Beuys* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997); and Lucrezia De Domizio Durini, *The Felt Hat: Joseph Beuys, A Life Told*, New English ed., Charta Risk 3 (Milan: Charta, 1997).

Beuys as an important precedent for site-specific public art projects through exhibitions such as "Places with a Past" in Charleston (1991) and "Culture in Action" (1992–93), featuring works deemed by critic Michael Brenson to be related to social sculpture.⁷⁰ Lacy was one of several artists who created a temporary project for "Culture in Action" that engaged different communities as participants in projects centered on issues such as female representation, the HIV/AIDS crisis, urban ecology, and Latino identity. Museum exhibitions and conferences dedicated to the artist's legacy, which began in the mid-to-late 1990s, brought further awareness to Beuys's work and supported his connection with the interests of US artists during this period.⁷¹

Beuys's impact began to be acknowledged by other artists, including Mark Dion and Daniel Joseph Martinez, who were combining their conceptual and performance practice with their pedagogic activities and a direct engagement with audiences, moving outside of galleries and museums and into underrepresented communities to create and present their work, a trend that was also seen in feminist art. Beuys represented the convergence of institutionally accepted art practice and community-based site-specific art with what up until that time had been considered by many to be peripheral to their artistic practice—namely teaching and a commitment to political causes. This was particularly poignant in Los Angeles, where there was a history of identity-based cultural organizations dedicated not only to feminism (the Woman's Building) but also to racial groups like African

70 "Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Work in Charleston," for the Spoleto Festival, Charleston, SC, May 24–August 4, 1991; "Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago," Chicago, May–September 1993 (dates above also include production of projects). See Michael Brenson, "Healing in Time," in *Culture in Action: A Public Art Program of Sculpture Chicago* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995), 16–49.

71 This includes the exhibition "Joseph Beuys Multiples" at the Walker Center for the Arts (1997–98) and three symposia: "Joseph Beuys Behind the Mask: His Travels in America" (December 12, 1994); "Considering Joseph Beuys" (April 5–7, 1995) at the New School for Social Research in New York; and "Joseph Beuys: Mapping the Legacy" (December 4–6, 1998) at the Ringling Museum of Art alongside the above exhibition.

Americans (Watts Community Art Center) and Chicanos (Social and Public Art Resource Center, or SPARC), which combined political activism with art production. Beuys not only provided a genus for their work with the term “social sculpture,” but alongside other central figures in the United States such as Chicago and Kaprow, gave them tools for engaging diverse publics about a range of issues.

Dorit Cypis is one such artist who during this time period was informed by the concept of social sculpture. She had learned about Beuys’s political practice at the Nova Scotia School of Art and Design (NSCAD), where Beuys took part in an international conference on the subject of contemporary art organized by Seth Siegelau in October 1970.⁷² Although a group of feminists led by Lippard wrote to the school to complain about the lack of female artists present, the topics discussed still resonated for female students like Cypis. Unlike the US feminist artists of the same time period, she was impressed by his concept of social sculpture, in particular the way it brought together sociopolitical themes, performance, and pedagogy and was enacted in public space. Thereafter, she began to cite Beuys as a formative influence in her own explorations of female identity alongside feminist precursors, such as Schapiro, who gave a consciousness-raising workshop at NSCAD in 1974; her contemporaries Lacy and Labowitz, whom she met when she moved to California for graduate school at CalArts in 1975 (Cypis studied with Asher and Baldessari, as the Feminist Art Program had ended just before she arrived);⁷³ and her encounter with Rosenbach and Sieverding, who came to CalArts in 1976–77.⁷⁴ Although her

72 The Halifax Conference took place on October 5–6, 1970 and included Carl Andre, Joseph Beuys, Ronald Bladen, Daniel Buren, John Chamberlain, Jan Dibbets, Al Held, Robert Irwin, Mario Mezz, Robert Morris, Robert Murray, the N. E. Thing Company (Iain and Ingrid Baxter), Richard Serra, Richard Smith, Robert Smithson, Michael Snow, and Lawrence Weiner. Garry Neill Kennedy, *The Last Art College: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1968–1978* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 58–59.

73 Dorit Cypis, telephone conversation with the author, December 22, 2015.

74 According to Rosenbach, in 1975 Baldessari invited her to “take care of the girls” at

training had been more philosophical, she saw a connection between the institutional critique of Asher and that espoused in Beuys’s projects, as well as the links between the ideas about politics and subjectivity found in Hélène Cixous’s writings and Beuys’s mystical sculptures. Consciousness-raising had given her the tools to access the psyche in much the same way as Beuys’s pedagogical experiments did to animate the imagination and intuition of the participants in his social sculptures—both were a means to change society through creative development. Following graduate school, she claimed the term “social sculpture” to describe the integration of her activity as an artist, focused on her interior experience, with her public role as an educator and administrator. This included acting as codirector (with Christina Ritchie) of the Foundation for Art Resources (FAR; 1979–82), a nomadic organization that fostered collaborations with local businesses and educational institutions to share resources and present public art in Los Angeles. For her, this alternative institution was public and aesthetic—not art, but rather the creation of an aesthetic frame that others could enter into.

In 1992, feeling the impact of the loss of National Endowment for the Arts funding, Cypis began to work with homeless teens at Project OffStreets, an outreach center in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Run by social workers, the space lacked a creative presence that Cypis felt she could fill. Her conversations with the teens resulted in Kulture Klub Collaborative (ongoing), a program that fosters relationships between the youth and artists, social service providers, arts organizations, and funding institutions. Kulture Klub offers access to art studios, theaters, and exhibitions; hosts artist residents; and organizes programs for the teens to present their own work. According to Cypis, these programs were

CalArts for two semesters following Chicago’s departure to start the Woman’s House with Shiela Levrant de Brettville and Arlene Raven in 1973. Wentrack, “The Female Body in Conflict,” 106–7.

successful in getting the teens to trust service providers and to express their own subjective experiences, which oftentimes included stories of violence, drug use, and poverty. Artwork opened them up to their own personal stories; however, it also gave them agency within their own communities and provided them access to other cultures both within Minneapolis and elsewhere in the world.

There are numerous ways that Cypis's work can be contrasted with Beuys's practice, much of which owes to their differing cultural and historical contexts. Cypis was reacting to the disastrous effects of neoliberalism on a vulnerable section of the population in a localized area, rather than seeking to ameliorate a universal social problem by establishing a revolutionary framework using art, as Beuys had done. The effects of her efforts are highly individualized to those involved in the center, and their broader resonance in society is anecdotal. Further, Cypis does not consider *Kulture Klub* an artwork, but instead describes the project in terms of her work as an artist. She has relinquished her authorial role to that of the team, emphasizing the creative production of her



Kulture Klub Collaborative, youth at Pizza Police hangout (Cypis in lower right), Minneapolis, MN, 1994. Image courtesy of Dorit Cypis.

collaborators and privileging the representation of their experience over her own (this is highlighted by her rare presence in photos of their activities). Though her artwork had once been intensely personal, a reflection of the constructed self within society, her work as a cultural mediator now provides the space for others to find their own modes of expression.⁷⁵ Nonetheless, *Kulture Klub* still embodies elements of social sculpture by nurturing participants' creativity and motivating them to make change within their own communities. It also connects to Beuys's pedagogic goal of fostering a two-way dialogue to guide individual development, which Cypis has continued as a professional mediator and in her recent discussions with the Los Angeles Police Department about nonviolence. As with Beuys, it is not always easy to distinguish her teaching from her art. The relationships and dialogue encouraged by these interactions are intended to empower the participants and develop creative potential, a direct link to the principles espoused in Beuys's belief that "everyone is an artist." Through these activities, Cypis has transformed social sculpture into a new genre that reflects US needs and issues.

Although Beuys had a long engagement with environmental issues and was known for his eco-activism in West Germany since the mid-1970s, it was only with the rise in notoriety of socially engaged and participatory art forms in the late 1980s and early 1990s that he became a central figure for US artists interested in ecologies, social and natural. Eco-artists in the United States at this time, such as Mel Chin, Mark Dion, and Mary Miss noted Beuys's participation in the founding of the German Green Party and his views on ecology and environmentalism. In addition, various iterations of Beuys's *7,000 Oaks* project (1981–87), for which the

⁷⁵ This has been to the detriment of Cypis's own recognition as an artist, as unlike many of her contemporaries, of which Lacy is perhaps no better example, she has received fewer accolades in the field of art.

artist initially planted trees and accompanying basalt stones in the German city of Kassel as an expression of his concept of social sculpture, began to appear across the United States.⁷⁶ According to art historian David Adams, Beuys was a “pioneer investigator of the role of art in forging radical ecological paradigms for the relationship between human beings and the natural environment.”⁷⁷ Such ideas coincided with feminist artists in the United States whose projects were increasingly research based, site specific, and contextual, and those who were interested in merging their environmental concerns and political activism with their aesthetic practice, including Labowitz, Rachel Rosenthal, and Bonnie Sherk.

Beuys became a reference for some eco-feminist artists who brought a gendered lens to ecology. One example is Mierle Laderman Ukeles, a younger contemporary of Beuys, who has undertaken many projects since the late 1960s that are both feminist and environmentally conscious. She began to see her work as a form of social sculpture in the 1970s, around the time that she visited Beuys’s performance *I Like America and America Likes Me* in New York in 1974, although it was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that she began to label them as such.⁷⁸ Like Beuys, Ukeles is interested in making the relationship between humans and nature more visible and using art as a catalyst for social and physical transformation. Her work since the 1960s also frames everyday life

76 The best known among these were planted following the artist’s death by the Dia Art Foundation (which initially provided financing for the project at documenta 7 in 1982) in front of 548 West Twenty-Second Street (the Dia exhibition space) in 1988 and 1996; thirty-six trees flank the street from Tenth to Eleventh Avenues. Between 1997 and 2000, similar tree-planting projects were initiated in Minneapolis, Minnesota; Omaha, Nebraska; Baltimore, Maryland; and Vermont. Addy Smith Reiman, “The Art of Urban Nature: Curating the City with the Work of Joseph Beuys” (MLA/MRP, Landscape Architecture and City Planning, Cornell University, 2011). See also Todd Bockley, “Tree Planting Project History,” ca. 1999–2000, Todd Bockley Archives, Minneapolis, MN.

77 David Adams, “Joseph Beuys: Pioneer of a Radical Ecology,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 26.

78 Mierle Laderman Ukeles, telephone conversation with the author, November 13, 2018. Ukeles was unaware of Beuys’s lecture several months earlier and admitted apprehension about speaking with the artist during his “office hours” as part of this performance.

as a creative activity, prompted by small, ritual gestures. However, she interprets social sculpture as the accumulation of social relationships in an artwork—that participants can see themselves reflected in its making and form—rather than employing Beuys’s definition, which she was unaware of at the time. Her work is also deeply linked to her Jewish religious beliefs, including the conviction that humans must protect and repair the earth, that everyone is creative, and that freedom should be afforded to all beings, values that she now directly ties to Beuys’s theories on art.⁷⁹

These principles are embodied in several decades-long projects that she has produced since 1969, when she began making projects under a manifesto of “maintenance art,” in which she reflected on her own experience as a mother as a form of art. This took the form of a series of projects of increasing scale, from intimate performances in which she cleaned sidewalks and museum floors, to multilayered projects in which she framed all of the maintenance activities transpiring inside of office buildings and cultural institutions as art. Since 1977, she has served as the first and only official artist in residence at New York City’s Department of Sanitation, where she has produced such projects as *Touch Sanitation* (1978–84), for which she met and shook hands with each of the city’s sanitation workers. This quasi-governmental position has allowed her to use her process-based art to effect actual change, as she helped gain recognition for city workers and the department’s services following a particularly low point in the city’s history when a financial crisis and near bankruptcy in 1975 had resulted in widespread layoffs and garbage lying uncollected on sidewalks. Her explorations of the social and ecological issues of waste management have taken numerous

79 Andrea Kirsh, “A Woman’s Work Is Never Done—Mierle Laderman Ukeles: Maintenance Art” at the Queens Museum,” *Artblog*, October 1, 2016, <https://www.theartblog.org/2016/10/a-womans-work-is-never-done-mierle-laderman-ukeles-maintenance-art-at-the-queens-museum/>.

forms—installations made of refuse, a mirrored garbage truck in which the city can “see” itself, and both small- and large-scale performances involving sanitation workers from across the globe—always with an eye toward systems and those who maintain them.

Her 1978 proposal to turn six of New York City’s landfills into public parks connects more explicitly to Beuys’s physical interactions with space, including *7,000 Oaks* and his 1983 proposal to rehabilitate a spoil ground near Hamburg, transforming it from a “zone of death” into an “zone of art.”⁸⁰ In 1989, Ukeles was awarded a Percent-for-Art commission (in which one percent of city-funded building projects are given to public artworks) to be the artist at the former Fresh Kills Landfill in Staten Island as the 2,300 acre site is detoxified and redesigned as Freshkills Park.⁸¹ For her contribution, she will design a three-part experiential artwork for one of the four former mounds of garbage entitled *LANDING*, composed of a cantilevered walkway, entitled *Overlook*, and two earthworks, *Earth Bench* and *Earth Triangle*. Each component will allow visitors to relate to the environment in a different way: perched from above, standing directly on top, and sheltered within the landscape. More importantly, however, she intends this site to be a place where the land can be renewed through the metaphysical transformation of energy—once a site for discarded waste, the park will eventually become an artwork activated by Ukeles’s intervention. She considers this the “ultimate embodiment of social sculpture,” as her plans

⁸⁰ Beuys suggested that he redesign a spoil ground where waste was deposited from dredging the Elbe River and install a basalt stele (taken from the same quarry as those for *7,000 Oaks*) inscribed with the title *The End of the 20th Century* at its center. The stone would be surrounded by fast-growing trees like poplar and willow, which would prevent the land from being further poisoned by the toxic materials in the dredge. After some controversy with the city’s residents over who would maintain it, the plans for this project were cancelled. Johannes Stüttgen, “Die Skulptur ‘7000 Eichen’ von Joseph Beuys,” in *7000 Eichen*, Joseph Beuys, ed. Fernando Groener and Rose-Maria Kandler (Cologne: Buchhandlung Walther König, 1987), 45–47.

⁸¹ See Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “Forgiveness for the Land—Public Offerings: Made by All, Redeemed by All,” in *Considering Forgiveness*, ed. Carin Kuoni and Aleksandra Wagner (New York: Vera List Center for Art and Politics, 2009), 174–81.



Mierle Laderman Ukeles at Freshkills Park, Staten Island, NY, 2016. Photo by Michael Anton; courtesy of the artist and Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York.

also involve the participation of more than one million people, each of whom will donate an object with a barcode linking to a description of it to be permanently embedded in the fifty miles of walkway at the site and accessible worldwide via an Internet database.⁸² This act is intended to connect the donors’ personal stories with the history of the site and to further expand the ecological system of the city. Moreover, it will demonstrate to visitors that the value of their objects is not lost in their new location and in being shared with others. Ukeles aims to “flood our environmental infrastructure with creativity,”⁸³ a goal that she shares with Beuys, who thought that creative energy could revolutionize society. However, it

⁸² Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “Proposal for 1 Million People to Participate in a Public Artwork: Public Offerings: Made by All, Redeemed by All,” proposal for Freshkills Park, Staten Island, NY, 2001–2. Published in the Fresh Kills Park: Lifescape, Staten Island, New York, Draft Master Plan, March 2006.

⁸³ Mierle Laderman Ukeles, “A Journey: Earth/City/Flow,” *Art Journal* 51, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 14.

also demonstrates the marriage of her aesthetic interests with her political concerns, a practice that is deeply connected to the concept of social sculpture.

While Beuys may not have been the immediate inspiration for Ukeles's project—nor for Labowitz, Lacy, or Cypis—her work nonetheless resonates with the concept of social sculpture in several key ways, demonstrating the pervasiveness of Beuys's legacy in socially engaged practice in the United States. Despite the initial widespread resistance to his persona in the 1970s, Beuys echoed the core belief of many second-wave feminist artists in the revolutionary potential of art. Therefore, it is unsurprising that some later returned to social sculpture as they conceptualized their own multilayered practice, particularly as they sought ways to combine their feminist ideals with other causes, such as environmentalism and homelessness, and more public outlets for their artwork. Beuys not only provided a genus for such work with the term "social sculpture," but alongside other central figures in the United States, gave them tools for engaging diverse publics about a range of issues. And although his own projects of social sculpture only scratched the surface of feminist concerns, a comparison between his work and US feminist art practice nonetheless permits us to understand the ways artists have attempted to enact social change by connecting personal experience to larger social issues.

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Attraction and Repulsion: An American Perception of Beuys

Daniel Joseph Martinez
Interviewed by
Cara M. Jordan

Cara M. Jordan: You and I have talked a lot about Beuys's legacy in the United States. You're one of the few people that I've encountered in the US who can speak about him accurately. I was wondering, as an American artist, how did you first hear about Beuys?

Daniel Joseph Martinez: My relationship to Beuys is different from most other American artists because I didn't learn about Beuys through a book. I learned about Beuys through timing and the world, you might say. I finished school at CalArts in 1979. The next year I ended up being an assistant for Klaus Rinke, who was one of Beuys's proteges. Rinke taught me for two years. He taught me directly what Beuys had taught him, albeit his own interpretation of it. Rinke was an adaption of Beuys, because Beuys was of the war generation and Rinke was the postwar generation. He was trying to come out from underneath what had happened in Germany during the war. That