



The Social Artist

Joseph Beuys

Bio-regionalism

Fate of the Earth

Spring 2014

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Editorial

The Luddites got it right after all! Machines were turning farmers, parents and craftsmen into the wage slaves of a productive system that would progressively isolate them from the natural world. Locked into the wages system, totally dependent upon a money income, women and men were losing the power to manage households and social forms in tune with the natural environment of the locality. Today, the descendents of the Luddites would probably be hard pushed if asked to name the wild plant on the cover of this issue of *The Social Artist* and to identify its culinary uses. Yet even a three-year-old can reel off a string of brand names and relate them to the products of the Machine Age.

A century after the Luddites, Clifford Hugh Douglas, following William Morris, John Ruskin and the later Guild Socialist thinkers, saw wage slavery as an unmitigated evil. They considered it absolutely crazy to spend all day working under orders in factory, mine, mill or office. For Douglas, machine technology was here to stay: there was no putting the clock back. But there was no earthly reason why modern science and technology should be used to enslave humanity, still less to wage war against the natural life support systems of the planet. Centralisation of control, whether by State or private corporations, would inevitably lead to a 'brave new dystopia', of the Nanny State controlled by Big Brother. "The only possible method by which the highest civilisation can be reached," wrote Douglas in 1922, "is to make it impossible for either the State

or any other body to apply economic pressure to any individual." That puts great responsibility upon the individual. Freedom cannot be given, because the giver can retract the gift. Hence in order to be free individuals must understand the system of oppression, so that they can unite to generate the necessary political will for change. Douglas placed great faith in the democratic system. The National Dividend could, he asserted, free all citizens from wage slavery, enabling them to decide the terms on which they would cooperate or associate with others. As the Alberta Experiment demonstrates, however, there were deep-seated political and cultural obstacles to the implementation of so visionary a reform of the money system (See *Understanding the Financial System* for details).

The tragedy of the twentieth century is that such far-sighted thinkers as Rudolf Steiner and Clifford Hugh Douglas have been consistently, repeatedly and ruthlessly silenced by the cultural institutions (again, see *Understanding the Financial System*). In this issue of *The Social Artist* we reprint David Adams' seminal article on the work of the renowned German artist Joseph Beuys who originated the term 'social sculpture' or 'social artist'. Inspired by the Anthroposophical teachings of Rudolf Steiner, Beuys sought to generate "a conscious dialogue regarding a social reform into three independent spheres, maintaining a free cultural and educational life, a democratic equality of rights, and a new cooperative economics". Douglas would probably

have been utterly bemused by Beuys's means of communicating his thinking on the social order. But Douglas, and the Luddites before, him would have stood

shoulder to shoulder with Beuys as he portrayed the power of money over social relations.

The Threefold Commonwealth in Context

Frances Hutchinson

During the 1920s, when Clifford Hugh Douglas brought his Social Credit theories onto the public arena, a great number of works were being published within the broad category of 'alternative' thought on social, economic and political issues. At that time, mainstream economic orthodoxy was still establishing its authority within the universities, and 'alternative' books and periodicals circulated across the broad spectrum of educated people. GK Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc brought their powerful pens into play in support of their 'Distributist' ideas on rights of access to land. The writings on Arts and Crafts, and on notions of good work, farming and the countryside by William Morris, John Ruskin, Edward Carpenter, Thorstein Veblen and many others were reprinted and widely discussed among the common people. Guild Socialist books ran to many editions, and *The New Age* was available through newsagents throughout the UK. It is in this climate that Rudolf Steiner's book, *The Threefold Commonwealth* first appeared in English.

Originally published in German under the title *Die Kernpunkte de Socialen Frage* by Rudolf Steiner Verlag, (Dornach) in 1919, it was translated into English and published by a mainstream publisher, George Allen and Unwin, London, in 1920 under the title *The Threefold State*:

The True Aspect of the Social Question. Subsequently it has been reprinted many times by Anthroposophical presses in London and New York, under a range of different titles. But it has rarely (if ever?) been the subject of study on university courses or outside the narrow confines of Anthroposophical organisations. Nevertheless, Steiner's *The Threefold Commonwealth* was for a while the subject of discussion in Social Credit and associated circles. Noting the common ground between the themes expressed in the book and his own writings, Clifford Hugh Douglas quoted from *The Threefold Commonwealth* in *The Control and Distribution of Production*, published by Cecil Palmer, London, in 1922, (and variously reprinted by mainstream publishers over the next decade). The connections between the two schools of thought was made explicit by Philip Mairet, a leading Social Crediter, in a series of three articles entitled "A New Proposal for Guild Organisation". Published in three parts in *The New Age* July 23, August 27 and September 3, 1925, the articles can be read on <http://douglassocialcredit.com/> In his article "Joseph Beuys: Pioneer of Radical Ecology" David Adams demonstrates the power of Beuys's lifetime's work to bring Rudolf Steiner's work to life in the late twentieth and early

twenty-first centuries. The article provides a valuable resource for all who are seeking to break the boundaries between creeds, cultures, belief systems and sectional

interests in the quest to create common ground in the fight for ecological, social, political and economic common sense. As such it merits wide circulation.

Joseph Beuys: Pioneer of a Radical Ecology

David Adams

*We thank David Adams most warmly for giving his permission to reprint this article in **The Social Artist**. Originally published in the Summer 1992 edition of **Art Journal** (pages 26-34), it included several illustrations of the work of Joseph Beuys. We deeply regret being unable to reproduce those pictures. For further information contact the author. We are also indebted to Pam Brook who alerted us to this article.*

An approach to ecology worthy of the epithet “radical” is one that does not limit its concerns to ecological systems within the natural world. Radical ecology also sees these in connection with larger patterns of human life: social

forms; economic theories, practices, and interests; political and legislative history and method; control of information and communications media; and, indeed, the underlying philosophies and teleologies of Western civilization. By this definition, the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-86) was not only a radical ecologist, but also the pioneer investigator of the role of art in forging radical ecological paradigms for the relationship between human beings and the natural environment. Here I would like to sketch the general parameters of Beuys’s complex relationship to ecology and discuss a few appropriate examples from his extensive artistic production.

Beuys was active politically as a forerunner and then co-founder and candidate of the German Green Party. In addition, he led a series of imaginative public political demonstrations for ecological causes, beginning with a successful effort to save a threatened forest tract in Düsseldorf in 1971.¹ But he also undertook searching explorations of how artistic creation can directly convey the existential attitudes of a more profound understanding of natural ecological relationships, and how an expanded conception of art can tackle even the social, economic and political reorganization of Western society. He saw this as necessary to replace the current ecology-destroying tendencies embodied in consumerism, patriarchy, statism, and capitalist growth. It is likely that Beuys remains today the most radical of all artists concerned with new ecological paradigms.

Beuys recognized that the entrenched, exploitative attitudes toward nature characteristic of Western civilization were, in fact, fundamentally based on individual modes of thinking and self-imagining, as well as (more obviously) on an economy oriented toward unlimited material growth to secure profits for a wealthy minority at the expense of the common good. He summarized the external societal problem as “complicity

between the power of money and the power of the state.”² His solution for this was drawn from anthroposophist Rudolf Steiner’s “threefold social order”; that is, he proposed to separate the workings of the economy, legislative politics, and culture, so that they operated as three independent spheres.³

However, much of his richly complex but enigmatic artwork was aimed at reaching more inward levels of human experience. No single language could tap the many levels of consciousness needed to perceive the totality of phenomena, and his continual experiments in artistic communication were directed at many degrees of comprehension. Behind the artworks were clear ideas and theoretical conceptions, but Beuys felt it to be more effective, whenever possible, to transform verbal dialogue into an “energy dialogue.”⁴ Much of his oeuvre attempted to convey forces and energies of the natural world, often grasped at a prelinguistic or presymbolic level, through his personally forged language of forms and substances. “All my actions,” he stated, “are based upon concepts of basic human energies in the form of images.”⁵ For Beuys the natural world, as well as the human psyche, were the loci of mysterious and meaningful interrelations, and he intended to transmit these through his art.

¹ This Action of December 1971 was titled *Overcome Party Dictatorship Now* and took place in the Grafenberger Wald, a wooded area threatened by the proposed expansion of the Rochus Club tennis courts.

² Carin Kuoni, comp., *Energy Plan for the Western Man: Joseph Beuys in America, Writings by and Interviews with the Artist* (New York: Four Walls Eight Windows, 1990), p. 107.

³ See Rudolf Steiner, *The Renewal of the Social Organism* (1919-20), trans. E. Bowen-Wedgewood and Ruth Mariott, rev. Frederick Amrine (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophic Press, 1985); idem, *The Social Future*, six lectures delivered October 14-30, 1919, in Zurich, trans. Henry B. Monges, 3rd ed. (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophic Press, 1972); and Joseph Beuys, *Appeal*, trans. R.C. Hay and B. Kleer of an article in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, December 23, 1978 (Düsseldorf: Free International University, 1979). Another translation of *Appeal* appears in Caroline Tisdale, *Joseph Beuys* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1979), pp. 283-84.

⁴ This is the wording in Tisdale, *Beuys*, pp. 228 and 235.

⁵ Götz Adriani, Winfried Konnertz, and Karin Thomas, *Joseph Beuys: Life and Works*, trans. Patricia Lech (Woodbury, N.Y.: Barron's Educational Series, 1979), p. 257.

Beuys's own thinking on ecological matters and their relationship to art passed through a development of several stages. During his childhood in the Lower Rhine village of Kleve, he showed a keen interest, both scientific and romantic, in nature, assembling and displaying collections of specimens and later taking a more analytical interest in botany and zoology. His teenage desire to study natural science was redirected towards art after a disillusioning encounter with the discipline's narrow specialty of interest, represented by a zoology professor at the Reich University of Posen (now Poznan), which Beuys attended during breaks in his military training as a radio operator from 1940 to 1941.⁶ This study was made possible through the largesse and encouragement of his military instructor, Heinz Sielmann, a former student of biology and zoology and maker of nature films. Their mutual explorations and discussions of natural phenomena continued for many years afterward, and Beuys later assisted Sielman on several of his nature films, expertly luring wild creatures to the camera by mimicking their cries. Through this relationship Beuys also became acquainted with the Austrian ethologist Konrad Lorenz and with other prominent biologists.⁷

During his artistic training at the State Academy of Art in Düsseldorf between 1947 and 1951, and until he gave up his master studio there in 1954, Beuys continued to maintain a small scientific laboratory in a corner of his work space. Many of his early artworks of the 1950s and 1960s dealt with creatures or forces

of natural ecologies, especially animals. When in 1962 he began to associate his work with the Fluxus movement and began presenting his first Actions, his initial (unrealized) project, *Earth Piano* of 1962, seems to have been an image of human culture reconnecting with the reality of the earth itself.

During the 1970s Beuys led several ecological protest actions and projects, beginning with two events of 1971. *Overcome Party Dictatorship Now*, a deforestation protest, involved sweeping the forest floor and painting white crosses and rings on all trees slated to be felled (fig. 1); *Bog Action* was an appreciation of threatened wetlands along the Zuider Zee. This was followed by his one hundred days of public discussion at the 1972 Documenta 5 in Kassel, which gave expression to his vision of a union of movements: the environmental, peace, ethnic, women's, civil rights, and spiritual, and included many topics of ecological interest, such as nuclear energy and its alternatives, and urban decay. Beuys was an unsuccessful candidate for the German Bundestag in 1976 and for the European Parliament in 1979, under the auspices of the Green Party. As a social and political extension of his artwork, he founded a series of political activist organizations, which sometimes tackled ecological causes and issues: the German Student Party in 1967, the Organization for Direct Democracy through Referendum (People's Free Initiative) in 1971, the Free International University for Creativity and Interdisciplinary Research in 1974

⁶ Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, trans. David Britt (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), p. 19; and Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 18.

⁷ Stachelhaus, *Beuys*, p. 27.

(whose prospectus included an Ecology Institute), and the German Green Party in 1979. Already in the 1960s he was recycling paper and warning that landfills might be leaching contaminants into the groundwater.⁸

Beuys continued specific ecological projects in the 1980s, among them the Spüfild Altenwerder pilot project, planned for Hamburg in 1983 as a planting of trees and shrubs in the polluted Altenwerder flats, to help bind toxic substances in the soil and protect the groundwater; and *7000 Oaks*, a massive tree-planting Action begun June 19, 1982, at Documenta 7 in Kassel, as an “ecological sign.”⁹ But already during the 1970s a fundamental shift had been taking place in his attitude toward ecological activism and change. In 1979 he described this: “I found it necessary to go on with a research enterprise and with a political movement related to every field of the society. Not only towards the ecological problems in democracy, but also to the freedom problem in creativity and then later in economics also; to change the whole understanding of capital.”¹⁰ This became an ongoing project, as Beuys acknowledged in a 1982 interview: **“We must continue along the road of interrelating socio-ecologically all the forces present in our society until we perform an intellectual action which extends to the fields of culture, economy, and**

democratic rights.”¹¹

Beuys’s changing understandings, both of art as a less object-oriented activity and of the solutions to ecological and social problems, were leading him to his new concept of “social sculpture.” He came to believe **“that a well-ordered idea of ecology and professionalism can stem only from art – in the sense of the sole, revolutionary force capable of transforming the earth, humanity, the social order, etc.”**¹² He began to speak of an “ecological *Gesamtkunstwerk*,” to be created through the democratic participation of all citizens in reconstructing “a social organism as a work of art.”¹³ Clearly, this implied a radically broadened conception of art itself, one that Beuys saw as synonymous with creativity in general. He was following Steiner’s argument that the true capital of economics was human creativity, a resource shared by all human beings.¹⁴ From this arose Beuys’s equation Art = Capital, although he did not intend it in the materialistic sense of today’s investment-art market. Indeed, Beuys was always uncomfortable with the marketing of his work as commodifiable objects.

The artist’s exploration of the nature of creativity, of the origins of humanly created form, led him still further, and here he relied much on the philosophical writings of Steiner, especially *The*

⁸ Kuoni, *Energy Plan*, p. 98.

⁹ Stachelhaus, *Beuys*, p. 146.

¹⁰ Kuoni, *Energy Plan*, p. 43.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 21; and Johannes Stüttgen, *Zeitstau: Im Kraftfeld des erweiterten Kunstbegriffs von Joseph Beuys* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 1988), p. 150.

¹⁴ See Rudolf Steiner, *World Economy* (14 lectures delivered July 24–August 6, 1922, in Dornach, Switzerland), trans. A. O. Barfield and T. Gordon-Jones, 3rd ed. (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1972), pp. 32, 50–56, 61; and Folkert Wilken, *The Liberation of Capital*, trans. David Green (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1982).

Philosophy of Spiritual Activity.¹⁵ “I cannot understand the idea of creativity,” stated Beuys, “where it is not related to the self-conscious ‘I’ which stands in the field of inner freedom.”¹⁶ While the human being is not truly free in many aspects of life, nonetheless, he argued, echoing Steiner, “he is free in his thinking, and here is the point of origin of sculpture. For me, the information of the thought is already sculpture.”¹⁷

To capulate this overall development in Beuys’s conceptions of art and of ecology, we may say that, while his understanding of ecological responsibility moved from scientific interest to public protest and alternative political organizations and then to the need to restructure society itself, based on philosophical analysis, his approach to art developed from traditional objects to installations and performances and then to the idea of “social sculpture,” involving everyone as an artist. Thus, the two lines of development merged in the conception of the “ecological *Gesamtkunstwerk*,” the social sculpture.

There was a historical and futurological aspect to Beuys’s analysis as well. He preached that one of the causes of our society’s disregard of natural ecological relationships was to be found in our

characteristic attempts to understand them purely through the “dead,” abstract, analytical thinking and narrowly specialized viewpoints of modern science (another prominent theme in Steiner’s work).¹⁸ In more ancient (presocratic) times, according to Beuys and Steiner, the scientific was contained within the artistic world view.¹⁹ Then the invention of images wasn’t “artwork,” but a magic and religious activity giving artist and community a transcendental connection, as well as intimate knowledge of nature and the environment. The eighteenth-century Enlightenment solidified a shift from this “collective, original, inspirational culture” to a logical, analytical, and materialistic form of knowledge. Beuys claimed that this was also valuable and historically necessary for the development of a strong sense of individual human freedom and self-determined, conscious knowing. The action of the hare that digs into earth became for Beuys an analogy with this penetration of matter’s laws through the activity of human thinking, which, he said, was thereby sharpened and transformed.²⁰

But this was not the final goal for humanity. Now Beuys – still following Steiner – called for an additional step, leading to new concepts of both art and

¹⁵ Rudolf Steiner, *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity* (1894, rev. 1918), trans. William Lindeman (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophic Press, 1986); or earlier translation by Michael Wilson titled *The Philosophy of Freedom* (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophic Press, 1964).

¹⁶ Kuoni, *Energy Plan*, p. 54

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁸ While many of Beuys’s artworks present this picture of a dead scientific thinking, I would cite the two dissection tables from a pathology lab used in *Show Your Wound*, an installation in Munich of 1976, and the rifle aimed at the painted bird marked *Denken* (think) in *I Want to See My Mountains*, an installation first shown in Eindhoven, Holland, in 1971. For Steiner’s presentation of the same theme, see Rudolf Steiner, *Goethean Science* (1883-87), trans. William Lindeman (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Mercury Press, 1988); *idem.*, *The Riddles of Philosophy* (1914), trans. Fritz C. A. Koelln (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophic Press, 1973); and *idem.*, *The Boundaries of Natural Science* (8 lectures delivered September 27-October 3, 1920, in Dornach), trans. Frederick Amrine and Konrad Oberhuber (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophic Press, 1983).

¹⁹ See Adriani, et al., *Beuys*, p. 66-67; and Rudolf Steiner, *he Arts and Their Mission* (8 lectures delivered May 27-June 9, 1923, in Dornach and Oslo), trans. Lisa D. Monges and Virginia Moore (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Anthroposophica Press, 1964).

²⁰ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 101.

science, based on the achievement of an enlivened and conscious intuitive mode of thinking. This would represent a new kind of spiritual understanding, equivalent to the mythical connections of earlier ages. He felt that his artworks were only comprehensible to such an intuition and not to linear, logical thought. To think in accord with reality, he argued, both causal and acausal thinking were needed. In all fields of knowledge and life, traditionally opposed, polar elements needed to be reintegrated to lead to expanded concepts and outlooks.²¹ For example, Beuys introduced, in connection with his art, the anthroposophical conception of space and counterspace.²²

Beuys contended that the separated “outsider consciousness” characteristic of the modern scientific world view was one-sided and unbalanced.²³ There was, he said, a sense in which human interiority was also outside in the environment, a sense in which human consciousness and the outer world were interdependent.²⁴ **“Environmental pollution advances parallel with a pollution of the world within us,”** wrote Beuys and the poet Heinrich Böll in their 1972 principles for the Free International University.²⁵ Development of a more living and vital human thinking was the internal reality corresponding to a longing

for external living nature. Conversely, an enlivened and more holistic thinking would better appreciate and respect the outer life of nature. Thinking occurs not only in the mind, proposed Beuys, but also within external natural processes. Beuys even claimed that he had thoughts in his knees.²⁶ The sharp, clear thinking of limited materialistic and rationalistic thoughts, and the seemingly absolute Cartesian alienation of self from object that this thinking was based upon, were identified by Beuys as the root causes of our ecological crises. Human alienation was, in turn, inflicted on the entire natural environment.

He argued that the abstract intellect centered in the head needed to be balanced with the revitalizing forces of feeling from the heart and active will from the limbs – a threefold composition of psychological powers derived from Steiner.²⁷ In a drawing of 1966, *Fat Ball: Mainstream Figure* (on loan to the Wilhelm Lehmsbruck Museum, Duisburg, from a private collection, Berlin), Beuys used a drawn image of one of his most misunderstood sculptural mediums, fat, as an analogue for the warming influence of feeling and willing needed to harmonize the one-sidedness of abstract thinking. Rather than clay or plaster, Beuys chose fat as a modeling medium, he once explained, because it

²¹ See Adriani, et al., *Beuys*, pp. 72 and 144-45; and Tisdale, *Beuys*, pp. 92 and 110.

²² See Adriani, et al., *Beuys*, pp. 129 and 144; Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 110; George Adams, *Physical and Ethereal Spaces* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1965); George Adams and Olive Whicher, *The Plant between Sun and Earth and the Science of Physical and Ethereal Spaces*, 2nd ed. (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1980), especially pp. 82-85; and Ernst Lehrs, *Man or Matter*, 3rd ed. (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1985), especially pp. 202-17.

²³ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 80.

²⁴ Max Reithman, “Language, Image and the Present in Beuys” in *Punt de confluència: Joseph Beuys, Düsseldorf 1962-1987*, exhibit catalog (Barcelona: Fundació Caixa de Pensions, 1988), p. 176.

²⁵ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 280.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁷ See Rudolf Steiner, *The Case for Anthroposophy*, trans. Owen Barfield (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1970), pp. 69-83 (partial translation of *Von Seelenrätselein*, Berlin, 1917).

responded so directly to warmth and cold and thus, as a material, made a suitable representation of the spiritual warmth (as opposed to merely physical heat) that he, following Steiner, saw as a link between visible and invisible levels of reality.²⁸ In addition, Beuys admired fat's easy transition between a melted, unformed, chaotic state and a cooled, specific form. He saw this as another analogue to the qualitative difference between cool, formed thinking and the raw, as yet unformed energy, of will power.

Through much of his artwork Beuys tried to give back to the spectator something of a lost sense for the "primitive wisdom of being," for the hidden connections between human life and that of natural ecologies and their energies.²⁹ A transformed and enlivened thinking would be revolutionary in effect, he felt, not only with regard to human beings' own psychological health and their relationship to nature, but also with regard to social, economic, and cultural forms. "That is a necessity for any evolutionary progress," he stated. "Transformation of the self must first take place in the potential of thought and mind. After this deep-rooted change, evolution can take place."³⁰ The flood of individual and social creativity such a change would release he identified with art itself: **"Only from art can a new concept of economics be formed, in terms of human needs not in the sense**

of waste and consumption".³¹

Beuys tried by a variety of means to use an expanded (or "totalized") approach to art to inform people in a revolutionary way about their psychological and spiritual potentials: objects, installations, multiples, events, Actions (performances), drawings, public dialogues, chalkboard diagrams, and interviews (fig. 2). Although some of these approaches relied heavily on language to communicate ideas directly, Beuys felt that his provocative objects, installations, and Actions worked more powerful personal and political effects on people than could a direct revelation in words of the ideas behind them. Probably referring to his artistic emphasis on the qualities of materials, he gave an image of his method in an early poem: "inductive pharmacy/metamorphoses/thoughts."³² Thus, he also argued that politics itself must become art to produce really effective change. **In later years he grew more pessimistic about the possibility of social change through typical political means (such as the Green Party) and placed even more emphasis on the self-determination of the individual ego as the only true social reshaping force.**³³

Similarly disenchanted with the narrow and elite "art-world ghetto," Beuys saw the end of modernism as a transition to an expanded "social art" or "social

²⁸ See Rudolf Steiner, *Warmth Course (The Theory of Heat)* (14 lectures delivered March 1-14, 1920, in Stuttgart), trans. unknown (Spring Valley, N.Y.: Mercury Press, 1980); Lehrs, *Man or Matter*, pp. 391-92; and Ernst Marti, *The Four Ethers: Contributions to Rudolf Steiner's Science of the Ethers: Elements – Ethers – Formative Forces*, trans. Eva Lauterbach and James Langbecker (Roselle, Illinois: Schaumburg Publications, 1984).

²⁹ Adriani, et al., *Beuys*, p. 147.

³⁰ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 95.

³¹ Jörg Schelmann and Bernd Klöser, eds., *Joseph Beuys: Multiples: Catalogue Raisonné Multiples and Prints 1965-1980*, trans. Caroline Tisdale, 5th ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1980), Part II (interview of June 1977).

³² Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 40.

³³ *In Memoriam Joseph Beuys: Obituaries, Essays, Speeches*, trans. Timothy Nevill (Bonn: Inter Nationes, 1986), p. 42.

sculpture,” in which everyone would participate creatively to re-sculpt the social body.³⁴ “Only a conception of art revolutionized to this degree can turn it into a politically productive force, coursing through each person and shaping history,” he proclaimed.³⁵ **“The socio-ecological approach begins with ‘Everyone is an Artist,’” he stated on another occasion, “with a concept of freedom and creativity involving social totality, and establishes for the first time socio-ecological work whereby environmental damage is eliminated from the roots.”**³⁶

In his own artwork Beuys saw the animal kingdom as an ally for the evolutionary process of broadening and deepening human awareness in these ways. The horse, stag, elk, coyote, fox, swan, goat, bee, hare, and moose all appeared in his drawings, performances, and sculptures, representing the primitive, pre-linguistic forces found in the connected interrelationships of natural ecologies undisturbed by civilization. “With these formulations from the world of animals,” he said, “I mean something about the connected meanings in nature, in the environment, the connected meanings of the forms of life which live with man and which we know as little as we know ourselves.”³⁷ At the same time Beuys felt that the essential being of animals gave access to forgotten spiritual energies now needed again by human society. In *The Chief – Fluxus Song*, an Action of 1964,

he emitted mimicked stag cries while rolled up for eight hours in a length of felt made of hare fur, with two dead hares at each end of the roll. These and other such works were attempts to conjure the energies of other life forms into the Action. As he put it, he tried to switch off the semantics of his own species in order to assist the kind of transformation of inner self necessary for any outward social and environmental change.³⁸ As part of the human responsibility toward other living things, Beuys said, he tried to speak for the animals who could not speak for themselves, and even included all animals in the German Student Party he founded in 1967.³⁹ “The sounds I make are taken consciously from animals,” he explained. “I see it as a way of coming into contact with other forms of existence, beyond the human one. It’s a way of going beyond our restricted understanding to expand the scale of producers of energy among co-operators in other species, all of whom have different abilities.”⁴⁰

The hare, which literally digs into matter (“incarnation”), represented the sharpened materialistic thinking of science that now needed to be informed by living intuitive thinking. This was in turn symbolized by the organic substance of honey and the gold of spiritual transformation that covered Beuys’s head as he “explained his pictures to a dead hare” in a famous 1965 Action. When he spoke to the dead hare, he

³⁴ See Adriani et al., *Beuys*, pp. 12, 21, 53; and Tisdale, *Beuys*, pp. 268-69.

³⁵ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 268.

³⁶ *In Memoriam*, p. 57.

³⁷ Schellmann and Klüser, *Multiples*, Part II.

³⁸ Adriani, et al., *Beuys*, p. 95.

³⁹ Kuoni, *Energy Plan*, p. 82.

⁴⁰ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 95.

spoke to an externalized part of himself (representative of all human beings), re-enlivening and reintegrating the dead thing (abstract thinking) that now existed outside himself as “object.”⁴¹ At the same time, even a dead hare seemed to Beuys to have preserved more powers of intuition than some stubbornly rational human beings. “The idea of explaining to an animal conveys a sense of secrecy of the world and of existence that appeals to the imagination,” he remarked.⁴² The source of honey, the beehive, was an embodiment of the social warmth and inclusive cooperative consciousness needed for nonhierarchical harmony between human beings and with the rest of the natural world. The stag, with blood flowing through its branching antlers, was a kind of image of an inner power of feeling, of a head enlivened with spiritual insight and intuition through the vitality of the blood circulating from the heart through the head and even outside the head.⁴³ Beuys’s use of felt, beeswax, gelatin, and fat all relate at one level to these ecological energy references and also expand the meaning to even more fundamental “sculptural” forces and formative energies of the world. Sometimes plants, too, were drawn into the service of this ecological vision. While working on what is probably still the world’s largest ecological sculpture, *7000 Oaks*, Beuys stated his feeling that trees today are far more intelligent

than people. In the wind that blows their leaves he sensed the essence of suffering human beings, as trees, too, are sufferers.⁴⁴

Beuys also anticipated something of ecofeminism in several artworks and projects. **Ecofeminism has been defined as the position that “there are important connections – historical, experiential, symbolic, theoretical – between the domination of women and the domination of nature.”**⁴⁵

Beuys related the masculine element to overintellectualized concentration on abstract powers of the head and to the warlike spirit of the god Mars. It was the one-sided domination of the world by this hard, cold, male tendency that had caused much of the suffering of humanity and nature, he stated. He expressed the anguish of this suffering in the painfully distorted face of a male bust emerging from the dragon’s mouth of a seven-meter-long, cast-iron gun barrel, in his autobiographical installation *Tram Stop* at the 1976 Venice Biennale. In his written sketch *Play 17* of 1963, thirty-four animals in a room (which I view as Beuys’s representatives of wild, “feminine nature”) disappear as soon as “West Man” enters and “East Man” is simultaneously projected on the wall.⁴⁶ Even his famous “fat corners” and *Fat Chair*, 1964, can be seen as images of how modern, male-dominated civilization

⁴¹ Reithmann, “Language,” p. 176.

⁴² Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 105.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 34, 58, and 101.

⁴⁴ Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 148.

⁴⁵ Karen Warren, “The Promise and Power of Ecofeminism,” *Environmental Ethics* 17 (Summer 1990): 125-146. For further information on ecofeminism, see Judith Plant, ed., *Healing the Wounds: The Promise of Ecofeminism* (Santa Cruz: New Society Publishers, 1991); Irene Diamond and Gloria Feman Orenstein, *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1990); Ynestra King, *Ecofeminism: The Reenchantment of Nature* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991); Karen Warren, ed., *Ecological Feminism*, special issue of *Hypatia* 6 (1991); and *Feminism, Ecology, and the Future of the Humanities*, special issue of *Studies in the Humanities* 15 (1988).

⁴⁶ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 89.

has mechanistically imposed the abstract cube and right angle on the naturally irregular and warmly flexible qualities of the feminine (fig. 3).

By contrast, Beuys stressed, humanity now needed a reemphasis on the feminine strengths of sensitivity, receptivity, warmth, creativity, spirituality, and openness to the future.⁴⁷ Even his own emblem (if not alter ego) the hare, was associated by Beuys with birth, women, menstruation, and fertility. In his watercolor *Genghis Kahn's Daughter Riding on an Elk*, 1958, and drawing *Girl Astronaut*, 1957,⁴⁹ he had already expressed the role he hoped for feminine qualities in the future evolution of humanity. In the latter, he placed a woman "astronaut" in the posture of the Graubelle Man, an anthropological specimen of early humanity that he had previously used to represent the potential spiritual evolution of humankind. He stressed the region of her heart and indicated receptivity to spiritual influences through "open fontanel stars" on her head. It was his early vision of "a special kind of future, and the particular abilities of the female in the era of men on the moon."⁵⁰ The title of another early work, his small bronze sculpture *Animal Woman* of 1949, made the ecofeminist understanding more explicit.

Many of Beuys's works have as a theme the reintegration, or rebalancing, of masculine and feminine values -

often represented by iron and copper, respectively, since the male body contains a slightly larger quantity of iron than the female body, while the latter has more copper. *Pt Co Fe* of 1948-72 (collection W. Feelisch, Remscheid), the traveling installation *Arena* of 1970-72, *Hearth I* of 1974 (expanded 1978), and *Fond IV/4* of 1979 (fig. 4) all express this theme. His teakwood sculpture *Virgin* of 1961 (fig. 5) represents one attempt to express the rebalancing he felt was needed, juxtaposing a nine-sectioned teak figure of a virgin woman on the floor with a square frame hung above her head, the frame representing "the cold, hard, crystallized, burnt-out clinker that I would call the male intellect, the cause of much of our suffering."⁵¹ Beuys's various political campaigns also promoted such measures as equal rights for both sexes, wages for housewives, and reservation of 50 percent of the seats in the German Bundestag for women.⁵²

The unique props or art objects used in Beuys's Actions frequently had an ecological reference. In his 1964 Action *24 hours . . . and in us . . . under us . . . landunder*, performed at the Galerie Parnass in Wuppertal, he used a two-handled spade and invited visitors and spectators to try to dig furrows with this unusual object before and after the Action (fig. 6). The two-handled spade suggested for Beuys the "compound action for people working the earth together."⁵³ The strange tool, with its heart-shaped

⁴⁷ See Beuys's comments in *ibid.*, p. 50.

⁴⁸ Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, p. 60; and Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 101.

⁴⁹ On loan to the Wilhelm Lembruck Museum, Duisburg, from a private collection, Berlin.

⁵⁰ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 36.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 50 and 68.

⁵² Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, pp. 42 and 110.

⁵³ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 84.

blades, was also an image of the need to penetrate the earth with heartfelt love and warmth. During the Action Beuys held the spade at heart level, sometimes raising it above his head and occasionally ramming it into the floor. “The relationship to agriculture is evident,” he said, “as are the warmth and love needed for a regeneration of the earth.”⁵⁴

In some Actions Beuys focused on exposing “trauma points” in modern materialistic social life and then attempting to effect a symbolic healing. In his famous *Coyote* of 1974 he tackled white America’s disrespect and lack of appreciation for both the Native American peoples and wild nature in the form of the coyote, an Indian image of cosmic spiritual-physical transformation (fig. 7). “The spirit of the coyote is so mighty,” announced the artist, “that the human being cannot understand what it is, or what it can do for humankind in the future.”⁵⁵ During a week of nights and days spent together with a coyote in the René Block Gallery in New York, Beuys tried to make contact with this essential spirit of the coyote and performed a cyclic sequence of actions, involving a number of representative materials and props: his felt and the coyote’s straw (which were exchanged many times); a flashlight, as an image of energy; a triangle chime, which he struck on occasion, as “an impulse of consciousness: for the coyote; contrasting recorded sounds of a confused roar of a turbine, to represent a more chaotic will energy, as well as human civilization’s

domination technology; brown gloves, to represent the freedom and flexibility of the human hand, in contrast to the specialization of animal extremities; and a daily stack of *Wall Street Journals*, to represent “the tyranny exerted by money and power” and “the diminished and destructive interpretation of money and economics, an inorganic fixation based solely on the production of physical goods.”⁵⁶ In the Action it could be said that the coyote reclaimed the objects representing the civilized world.⁵⁷ In a later installation, created at Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, in 1979, he recapitulated some of these events, but without the live animal (fig. 8).

In *Tallow*, 1977, Beuys chose a “sick” spot in the urban environment of Münster, the “wound” of an ugly corner of a rectilinear building, created through the abstract thinking of modern city planning and architectural design. He then cast, in a huge block composed of twenty tons of animal fat, the “negative” of this wedge-shaped space under an access ramp to a pedestrian underpass. Through the qualities of fat, he intended to bring a new warmth to the cold one-sidedness of the underpass, and then to effect a healing by reintegrating the warm and the cold poles. Tisdale has called Beuys’s effort “an extraordinary example of absurd artistic license put to didactic and provocative use, a critique of the soullessness of our environment transformed into a survival battery of warm energy: a reserve of fat.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 84.

⁵⁵ Kuoni, *Energy Plan*, p. 142.

⁵⁶ Ibid., pp. 142-43.

⁵⁷ Tisdale, *Beuys*, p. 228.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 253.

Many other artworks included similar attempts to affect what Beuys saw as the psychological and spiritual roots of our destruction of the natural world, as well as of healthier social relationships. It is not easy to judge the efficacy of Beuys's faith that spectators would grasp at some level his unusual uses of unusual materials, and his references to the powers of animals and to other invisible energies of the natural world. Today, his creations still seem to speak to viewers on several levels. However, one seldom finds his work generating that conscious dialogue regarding a social reform into

three independent spheres, maintaining a free cultural and educational life, a democratic equality of rights, and a new cooperative economics. This would surely be disappointing to the man who felt that only out of such participatory dialogue of reform could the worldwide ecological crisis be healed, and who fervently hoped his artwork would become a "humus of concepts and ideas, as the basis for a living form."⁵⁹

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⁵⁹ *In Memoriam*, p. 37.

A Sense of Beauty

In ancient times the love of the beauty of the world had a very important place in men's thoughts and surrounded the whole of life with marvellous poetry. This was the case in every nation in China, in India and in Greece...

Today one might think that the white races had almost lost all feelings for the beauty of the world, and that they had taken upon them the task of making it disappear from all the continents where they had penetrated with their armies, their trade and their religion. As Christ said to the Pharisees: 'Woe to you for ye have taken away the key of knowledge; ye entered not in yourselves and they that were entering in ye hindered' (Luke 11:52).

And yet at the present time, in the countries of the white races, the beauty of the world is almost the only way by which we can allow God to penetrate us, for we are still further removed from the other two. Real love and respect for religious practices are rare even among those who are most assiduous in observing them, and are practically never to be found in others. Most people do not even conceive them to be possible. As regards the supernatural purpose of affliction, compassion and gratitude are not only rare but have become almost unintelligible for almost everyone today. The very idea of them has almost disappeared; the very meaning of the word has been debased. On the other hand a sense of beauty, although mutilated, distorted and soiled, remains rooted in the heart of man as a powerful incentive. It is present in all the preoccupations of secular life. If it were made true and pure it would sweep all secular life in a body to the feet of God, it would make the total incarnation of the faith possible. Moreover, speaking generally, the beauty of the world is the commonest, easiest and most natural way of approach.

Simone Weil, *Waiting on God*, tr, Emma Craufurd (Collins 1974) p.115

Notes on Production, Money and Value

by Beuys, Orage and Douglas

In his 1992 article on Joseph Beuys, reprinted in this issue of *The Social Artist*, David Adams observed that in one of his installations the artist used a stack of Wall Street Journals, renewed daily, to represent “the tyranny exerted by money and power ... and the diminished and destructive interpretation of money and economics, an inorganic fixation based solely on the production of physical goods.”

In *An Alphabet of Economics*, published in 1917, the year before he met Clifford Hugh Douglas, A.R. Orage drew a distinction between economics as production of real wealth for use, and economics as production of financial values. He observed as follows: “Properly speaking (speaking, that is, as sensible people like Ruskin and Carlyle, and you and I speak), Economics is the science of the employment of human abilities in the production of human utilities, and its object as an applied science is to produce the maximum real utilities with the expenditure of the minimum of human abilities. But economics in the hands of commercial men is not the same. Its object is to produce the maximum number of marketable utilities at the minimum cost to the persons who bring them to market. It is, in short, **the science of production for profit, not the science of production for use.** This distortion of common words and common sense is responsible for all the double entendre of economics; and it completely confuses almost everybody who deals with the science. The poor things are under the impression that when they are discussing economics they are discussing production for use; and all the time they are really discussing marketing and swindling. The latter is, indeed, a “dismal science”; it is the black shadow cast by real science; and

men who grope about in it without knowing the real science exists, are lost.

“There are two main kinds of production – the production of value and the production of price. For the most part, manufacturers are people engaged in the production of values – in other words they produce things that are actually in market demand; while, for the most part, merchants are people who are engaged in manipulating price to their own advantage. The former make, the latter sell; the former actually produce, the latter only exchange. The former create value, the latter determine price. A conclusion that follows from this simple analysis is that by no means the whole of Society is engaged in the production of values. The supposition is pathetically common that Society wishes to produce as much as possible. The very opposite, however is true: it wishes to produce as little as possible of actual value and to obtain for it as high as possible a price. ... A certain amount of real value is necessary to the game of manipulating prices: in other words, a manufacturer is necessary in a certain measure to the merchant. But as little as possible. As it is, about every second person in the nation lives by manipulating the prices of real values which the first person creates. They are both lumped together, however, as producers, though the second is really a parasite upon the first.” (Extract from A.R. Orage, Editor of *The New Age, An Alphabet of Economics*, T. Fisher Unwin Ltd., 1917)

In *Credit-Power and Democracy*, published in 1920, Douglas developed the theme: “A factory or other productive organization has, besides its economic function as a producer of goods, a financial aspect ... as a manufactory of prices – financial values.” This was the basis of his “A+B Theorem”.

Book Reviews

The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth

by *Thomas Berry*

Orbis Books 2009

ISBN: 978-1570759178

160pp £12.99

I read this book as the UK faced severe weather events. Media coverage of flooded homes, storm-lashed coasts, and crippled transport infrastructure were a vivid illustration of the growing challenge of climate change, and the urgent need for us to work with nature, rather than fight a losing battle against it. So it seems increasingly important that the message contained in Thomas Berry's book is understood and embraced.

Thomas Berry died in 2009 and this book was published posthumously. A collection of ten essays, written between 1987 and 2000, it is a good introduction to the work of a great thinker and a great spirit.

As a Catholic priest of the Passionist order, Berry had a deep Christian faith, but this supremely gifted man was much more than a priest, and his faith was much bigger than an adherence to one narrowly defined creed. As a scholar and a teacher, to describe his approach as 'holistic' would be true, but also an enormous understatement. He rejoices in diversity, and his inclusive philosophy and spirituality embraces not only other religions, scriptures, and cultures, but science and the entirety of Creation.

Berry, who studied both Chinese and Sanskrit languages, took inspiration from an enormous range of sources, but had a particular affinity for St Thomas Aquinas, from whom he took his clerical name, and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit priest who trained as a palaeontologist and geologist.

A quote from Aquinas illustrates how startlingly relevant ancient writings can be in our modern age. The 'perfection of the universe' lies in its diversity, says Aquinas,

'For goodness, which in God is simple and uniform, in creatures is manifold and divided; and hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly and represents it better than any single creature whatsoever.'

Taking this as his starting point, Berry infers that consequently there is no area of human knowledge or experience which should remain outside the remit of a Christian. He is saddened when his own Church claims to have a monopoly on truth, and asserts, 'When the religious traditions are seen in their relations to each other, the full tapestry of the revelatory experience can be observed.'

With the advancement of scientific understanding of how the earth and humanity came into being he says, 'For the first time the entire human community has, in this story, a single creation or origin

myth. Although it is known by scientific observation, this story also functions as myth.' So he believes that for the first time in human history humanity can unite in a truth which is relevant to all and includes all.

For Thomas Berry, the natural world and the human community are seen as 'a unified single community with an overarching purpose: the exaltation and joy of existence, praise of the divine, and participation in the great liturgy of the universe.' So the degradation of the earth and man's alienation from nature is seen as a tragedy, and spells certain death for the planet if we do not change our ways. For the Church, which Berry feels has in the past been part of the problem, it is an urgent necessity to become part of the solution. In fact he says it is 'the fundamental task of the Church in the twenty-first Century.'

Thomas Berry's work is an antidote to and a challenge to literalist and fundamentalist Christians around the world who rather depressingly embrace ignorance to reinforce their own certainty. When all humanity's hard-earned knowledge of

Creation, evolution, and the grandeur of our Universe is rejected in favour of a literal interpretation of the Bible we diminish ourselves and our faith.

It is sad that Thomas Berry will not be around to read a new encyclical on ecology which it is said Pope Francis is working on. It would have been fascinating to see his analysis of it. One hopes that he would find it encouraging, and would also be encouraged to see the work in the UK of organisations like Operation Noah, 'informed by the science of climate change, motivated to care for creation by our faith and hope in God, and driven by the desire to transform and enrich our society through radical change in lifestyles and patterns of consumption.'

As more and more Christians become aware of the threat of climate change Thomas Berry's work should become increasingly relevant and inspiring.

Bernadette Meaden writes on political and social issues, and currently blogs for *Ekklesia*, the beliefs and values think tank.
<http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/blog/1251>

**The Bioregional Economy:
Land, liberty and the pursuit of
happiness**

by *Molly Scott Cato*

Routledge/Earthscan

ISBN: 978-0-415-50082-1

Pb. 250pp. £29.99

The case for a bioregional approach to the management of natural and human resources is presented with clarity and vision in this ground-breaking analysis of

the evolution of the unsustainable market economy. Leading green economist Molly Scott Cato argues that science presents irrefutable evidence that the present economic system poses threats to the sustainability of the earth's ecosystems. Rather than impose limits and restrictions on resource use, she calls for the re-enchantment of our relationship with the biosphere through imaginative creativity. A bioregion is a local area defined by its geographical features rather than a

political area. Its streams, rivers, hills, valleys, soils and woodlands form home not only to the local human community but also to the plant and animal populations of which humans form a part. The bioregional approach to economics allows the concept of a local economy to cover not only human provisioning activities but also the entire range of the social, political, psychological and spiritual life of the community. The concept of bioregion contrasts sharply with the market model of the economy as developed over the period of industrialisation. Under the market model land ceases to be the source of all life, the essential resource for ecological, social and spiritual renewal. It becomes merely any substance lying around on or under the land available to be taken from the land for the purpose of producing a concrete item for sale on the market. At the same time people cease to be “people or citizens or even workers”. The existence of a “labour market” transforms the economic agent into a mere marketable entity to be employed in the production of saleable products.

Thus the world economy is capable of “subjecting the surface of the planet to the needs of industrial society”. The land is taken forcibly from the people through enclosures and made into a commercial resource. Technology artificially forces the increase in productive capacity, and the system of surplus capacities extended through international trade, creating overseas and colonial markets, and the result is an un-sustainable global market mechanism dominating all economic life. Cato cites Karl Polanyi: ‘Though the institution of the market was fairly common since the later Stone Age, its role

was no more than incidental to economic life’, a modern, short-lived aberration. For Cato, as for Polanyi, ‘economic life’ is the tangible relationships between humanity and the sustaining life forces of the Earth. The market, on the other hand, operates as a mythical force under the Utopian illusion that financial relationships are of sole significance.

Although written with an academic market in mind, this work is far from being a dull, negative critique of the finance-dominated global economy. On the contrary, it is packed with insights into workable alternatives. Kropotkin is cited: “the greatest sum of well-being can be obtained when a variety of agricultural, industrial and intellectual pursuits are combined in each community; and that man shows his best when he is in a position to apply his usually varied capacities to several pursuits in the farm, the workshop, the factory, the study or the studio, instead of being riveted for life to one of these pursuits only.”

Here, as in her other recent works, Cato is most interesting on the subject of the guild socialist critique of the wasteful production, disregard for nature and damage to social wellbeing that is the inevitable result of capitalist market philosophy. The medieval guild system was designed to prevent exploitation of people and natural resources for private profit by providing “a moral framework within which skilled work, and the sale of its products, could take place”. Finance capitalism forcibly swept away these restrictions, to make way for economic ‘progress’ and the corporate state. Citing contemporary authorities, Cato demonstrates that “work is a process of mediation between human beings and the natural world”, arguing that it is now necessary to restore the dignity and

spiritual value of work. The division of labour disastrously divides people from each other and from the local natural environment, its species and their habitats. A bioregional approach to production and provisioning would, she suggests, re-embed productive systems within their social and environmental settings. However, questions of the source of the political and legal powers necessary to challenge patterns of ownership and control of resources are only tentatively raised. Presently finance, backed by legal and military force, can intervene in any bioregion of the world to extract valuable resources, leaving a wasted and degraded land.

The Bioregional Economy is an artfully assembled review of good practice at household, local community, national and

international levels, deserving to be study read by the widest possible readership. This book will be welcomed by all who have the remotest interest in the future of humanity on the Earth. Full of insights which go to the heart of the contemporary malaise, this work offers academics and social activists alike the solid foundations for building interlinked networks of ecologically and socially sustainable local economies. More importantly, it offers the ordinary men and woman the inspiration to tackle the future with hope and enthusiasm. Without the political will of the common people to bring about change in their own homes, all reforms, rules and regulations will merely serve to accelerate the degradation of the social and life support systems of the world economy.

Frances Hutchinson

The Day Hospital

by *Sally Read*

Bloodaxe Books, 2013

ISBN 978 1 85224 948 9

Pb, £8.95

The Day Hospital is a free verse set of twelve portraits. All the subjects are elderly and linked by their attendance at a Day Hospital in central London, reflecting the experience of Sally Read when she worked as a community psychiatric nurse. The twelve monologues run across a typical day, expressing the feelings and giving the history of each speaker. Most are immigrants: Irish, West Indian, Polish, Italian and German; though in each case the “uprootedness” is different, mental illness and depression contribute to each desperate story. Perhaps the most terrible are the voices of those who came to this

country as refugees from Nazi Germany, leaving others in their family behind to die. There seems no healing possible for this.

In reading the poems we hear the individual voices clearly- Sally Read has conveyed their accents and dialects with pinpoint accuracy. Thus Pat, an Irish builder, describing a test he is being asked to complete:

“This morning
they point out a picture
a complicated
tangled thing
with no order
too many people
a light
shadows “

or Theresa, also Irish and a schizophrenia

patient, expressing her loneliness in London among the “stream of bodies on Oxford Street” continuing what she knew as a priest’s housekeeper back in Ireland.

“when I enter the sacristy he does not look up.
Like a brother, like a husband, like a father.

The poignancy of lifelong suffering and disappointment is intensified in the voices of those who came to England during World War II, such as Agnieszka, who escaped from Warsaw with her mother and brother, but whose father “was still in Poland “
London links the sufferers together and Sally Read describes the grimmer side of it with unflattering language, but there are lighter moments, including a brief glimpse of St Patrick’s, Soho, among the sex shops and sports cars - an oasis of “Romanesque arches and incense in open darkness”.
Perhaps the most haunting portrayal is of Daniele, an Italian Jewish man who arrived in London during the War without his parents. At the age of 65 he finally throws himself from the roof of a 14 storey building. Before he dies the recurring memory of his childhood agony returns:

“Mother stood with me at the Arno’s edge
Nazis coming, water a softer death”
but she “pushed me to England, far from sight.
I stepped from a train to infinite light”

The terrible description of his death is shattering and like so much else in the book, shows us that there are no easy answers.

Yet it would be wrong to dismiss the poems as uniformly depressing. Sally Read’s language is simple, direct and clear. The twelve patients are shown throughout a day, and their homes in different parts of London give variety and shape to the overall picture.

The portraits are all compelling, and though the sadness of their lives is undeniable, reading these poems makes you grateful for the long loving look Sally Read has given to her subjects. She is a deeply compassionate writer, who has written elsewhere of how we “so often mentally strike off the drunk, the poor who spend their money on cigarettes, or the simply unlovable. The main thing, with each other and with God, is to love intrepidly. And not to loosen our hold.”
What a valuable corrective her book is in the current climate of official intolerance and blame of the poor.

Cathy Martins, specialist in English literature.

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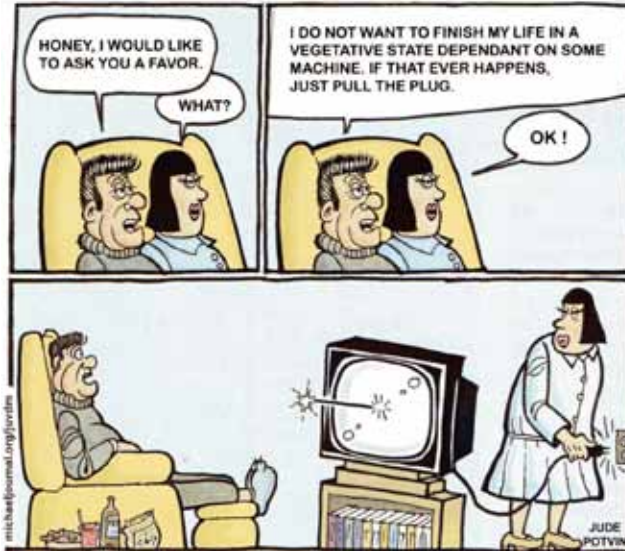
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**If we want to achieve a different society
where the principle of money operates equitably,
if we want to abolish the power money has over people historically,
and position money in relationship to freedom, equality, fraternity ...
then we must elaborate a concept of culture
and a concept of art
where every person must be an artist ...**

Joseph Beuys *What is Money? A Discussion*, Clairview Press, 2010.

The Social Artist is a quarterly journal dedicated to breaking the boundaries between Christian Social teaching, Anthroposophical Social Renewal, and the institutional analysis of money as presented by the Social Credit movement.