Joseph Beuys
The Schlegel Collection of Multiples
“I am a sender, I transmit”
Joseph Beuys, 1964

Joseph Beuys
Multiple Message

Eugen Blume

I n the early 1960s Joseph Beuys developed his idea of the multiple from a relatively basic concept that emerged out of the FLUXUS movement into a more complex art form. This was very much in keeping with his belief that art can be a powerful and far-reaching agent. The prototypes for these editions, often only slightly altered yet already conceived as part of a whole, were produced to facilitate an all-encompassing art context. No other artist of the late 20th century has reacted so prodigiously to the art of the 20th century avant-garde. Duchamp was the towering figure formulating ahead of his time many of the criteria of the different relationships which then demand a critical intervention against which even his own far-reaching notion of art had to be measured. He refused to take seriously the role of the “masses,” which he saw rather as a danger to the intellectual aspect of art. All social implications were anathema to Duchamp, and it is precisely out of this concept that Beuys developed his idea (born from 19th century romanticism) to poeticize the world and to allow everyone to take part in it. Beuys claimed: “everyone is an artist” and he saw art, that is to say the intellectual capabilities of human-beings, as his own capital. For Beuys, these human capabilities, so exemplarily manifested in art, were a guarantee for the future of society: a whole and not the financial gains of strategic speculation and accumulation of enormous riches in the hands of the few. In order to spread these basic ideas of a new society transformed by art, Beuys had to find a format compatible to Duchamp’s 300 boxes. These boxes represented a three dimensional version of Duchamp’s ironically skeptical (one could say Cartesian) world-view. Beuys, on the other hand, refused all forms of skepticism as the basis for his multiples. Instead, he wanted to express a sense of revolutionary confidence. “La rivoluzione siamo Noi!” (We are the revolution) appears in Italian on one of his multiples. Just as the editions in their small formats and as affordable original artworks were supposed to reach everyone, so too were the ideas implied in them available to everyone. This “small” art form, which grew to 557 works, encompasses in its totality his complete oeuvre as well as his extensive battery of ideas. Whereas Beuys’s large-scale sculptures are permanently housed in various museums and his form of Duchamp’s ready-mades on paper are rarely dispalyed due to their sensitivity to light, the multiples represent a relatively robust and easily movable body of work, which can be installed without much difficulty in a variety of locations. The multiples are furthermore closely associated with Beuys’s concept of a Free International University (F.I.U.), another movable notion. In 1970, Beuys, in one of his discussions, said: “For me every edition has the character of a condensation nucleus to which many things can attach themselves […] I am interested in the distribution of physical vehicles in the form of editions because I am interested in the dissemination of ideas. The objects can only be understood in relation to my ideas.”

Often, in an international context, Beuys would make use of his multiples to convey his ideas quickly and easily. For example, the comprehensive exhibition of multiples in the Ulbricht Collection shown in Oslo in 1982 laid out the parameters of his exhibitions. Invited by the Selbu Museum in Tokyo, Beuys traveled to Asia for the first time in 1984. Here too, he showed the Günter Ulbricht Collection, but on this occasion using it to illustrate his vision of uniting East and West in the Asian world, ideas he had already touched upon in his EURASIA-Thoughts in the early 1960s. The five days in Tokyo were accompanied by an extensive program of lectures and discussions. Also at this time Beuys was about to realize his ecological-social monumental sculpture “7000 Oaks” which he had initiated in 1982 at Documenta 7 in Kassel. Both these exhibitions have been particularly helpful, especially since Beuys’s death, in understanding how the artist himself envisioned the installation of his multiples in a spatial and thought-provoking context.

The assertion made by Beuys “If you have all my multiples, then you have me completely” provides the key to understanding the significance, both physically and intellectually, of these editions. It is less a question of incidental objects produced as favors for collectors and art dealers, but more a strategic program which has a bearing on every aspect of Beuys’s thinking, thereby encompassing the idea of his comprehensive legacy. Beuys, as with his monumental sculptures, actions, performances or political events, took great pains to imbue the smaller editioned objects with an aesthetic and memory-laden character that flowed through the overall context of his multiples. He worked on these objects, editions, prints and texts with great care giving them the same special aura inherent in his large scale works. He wanted to give an account of his immense output, while at the same time accepting the legitimacy of single editions which were, however, ultimately conceived to form a unified group, in his words a “Block.” Beuys used this sculptural term to address the idea of bringing together, in one spatial context, works composed of many parts. The most important and best known example is the so-called “Beuys-Block” of 7 rooms installed by Beuys himself in the Hessisches Landesmuseum in Darmstadt. In the “Beuys-Block” the use of vetrines as sculptural elements is of particular significance. They are not merely containers housing a collection of small ‘things’ but serve as a theatrical stage upon which those objects can be arranged in a precise and deliberate manner that corresponds to the artistic notion of harmony and aesthetics. Fully respecting the idea of a “block,” Beuys understood that the often smaller-sized multiples should be displayed in vetrines. He therefore established a guiding principle that would be helpful when installing exhibitions. Photographic documentation of the individual vetrines, including the extensive biographical exhibitions, including the edition already mentioned, can be of considerable help to us today in understanding the look and construction of an “original” Beuys block. To this end he said this, however, Beuys was the defender of slavishly copying pre-existing installations. He himself loved the notion of variation so long as any changes remained true to his original principle of constant energy. This was the case with his multiples. The Berlin collector Reinhard Schlegel has, for the second time, assembled one of the largest collections of Beuys multiples. This is indeed an astonishing accomplishment, and one that most certainly cannot be repeated a third time. Today, collections of this magnitude are all to be found in museums, such as the collection of Bernd Klüzer now in the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich and the collection in the Walker Art Museum in Minneapolis, to name just two. Reinhard Schlegel’s second collection, larger than his first, in its unparallel breadth has come to exemplify the full story of Beuys’s achievement.

A few days before his death, Joseph Beuys arranged for a symbolic memorial to be installed in the Museo Capodimonte (Palazzo Reale) in Naples, his favorite city. In four large museum-style vetrines one could see the paraphernalia of the wanderer, the shaman and Beuys, the artist. These were surrounded by shiny brass plaques, making visible the boundary between life and death. Into this installation Beuys introduced a final multiple growing with optimism: the Capri Battery, made in December 1985. By combining the notions of human and nature, the multiple of light bulbs screwed into its socket) and nature (depicted by a lemon) Beuys powerfully illustrated the source of all our achievements. This union of two disparate objects testified to an ecological balance which, at the end of Beuys’s life, served to remind us that he had dedicated his entire oeuvre to a potential reconciliation between man and nature. To convey this message, he chose a small multiple, an editioned object, with which his inheritance could be transmitted to mankind in all corners of the world. It was important for Beuys that the lemon should be a real fruit, which the owner of the work has to replant in order to perpetuate his idea. This, Beuys insisted, symbolizes the life-ensuring act of regeneration. Beuys demonstrates in the simplest of terms that nature is essential but that its resources are not infinite. Last we forget, Joseph Beuys was one of the first artists of the post World War II ecological party, “The Green Party,” and put himself forward as a German parliamentary candidate. His is a story told through multiples. The life work is inseparable from Beuys the political figure. And as a public figure, in his recognizable outfit of hat and hunting vest, Beuys exposed himself to the fundamental experiment of art achieving freedom.

“There is a long term effect. Many write to me, some criticize me. But they keep coming.”

NOTES
4. The Collection was put together with the help of Joseph Beuys and is the comprehensive collection of his multiples, now permanently housed in the Kunstmuseum in Düsseldorf.
5. Sonja Herms – Niels Ørsted Foundation, Hoolidlool/Oaks 1982
6. Beuys planned to plant 7000 oak trees in and around Kassel, and sought financial support for the project up until his death. For example, he used the proceeds received from a publicity film made by the Japanese company Nikka Whisky to fund the 7000 Oakes project.
8. The installation is now in the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf.
Silver Broom and Broom without Bristles, 1972

Felt Suit, 1970
“If you have all my multiples, then you have me completely.”

“I like America and America likes me.”
EUROPAWAHL
die GRÜNEN

La Rivoluzione siamo Noi, 1972

The Invincible, 1979

"Beuys: Der Unbesiegbare

La Rivoluzione siamo Noi, 1972
Works Illustrated

Page 1

We Won’t do it without the Rose, 1972
Color offset on cardstock, with handwritten text
3 1/2 x 22 in. (80 x 55.8 cm.)
Edition: 80 plus XX, signed and numbered
Publisher: Edition Staeck, Heidelberg
(Schellmann 82)

Page 2

Earth Telephone
(White Paper Version), 1973
Silkscreen on felt board
39 x 23 1/8 in. (99 x 60 cm.)
Edition: 100 plus XII, signed and numbered
Publisher: Edition Schellmann, Munich
(Schellmann 101)

Page 3

Capri Battery, 1985
Offset and silkscreen on heavy paper
23 1/2 x 17 in. (60 x 43 cm.)
Edition: 35 plus V, signed and numbered
Publisher: Edition Staeck, Heidelberg
(Schellmann 542)

Page 7

Felt Suit, 1970
Felt, sewn; stamped
Approx. 67 x 23 1/8 in. (170 x 60 cm.)
Edition: 100 plus 10 h.c., numbered, unsigned
Publisher: Galerie René Block, Berlin
(Schellmann 26)

Page 8–9

Sied, 1969
Wooden sled, felt, belts, flashlight, fat and rope
13 1/2 x 25 1/2 x 13 3/16 in. (35 x 64 x 33.5 cm.)
Sled stamped with oil paint (Browncross)
Edition: 50 plus 5 h.c., numbered, unsigned
Publisher: Galerie René Block, Berlin
(Schellmann 12)

Page 10

Telephone T----R, 1974
Two tin cans, one with brown paint (Browncross); string, label
Cans 4 1/2 x 4 in. (12 x 10 cm.)
Edition: 24 plus VI, signed, numbered on label; plus a few unnumbered a.p.;
plus 6 with paint (Browncross) on second can as well
Publisher: Edition Schellmann, Munich
(Schellmann 136)

Page 11

Double Horse, 1985
Offset and silkscreen on heavy paper
23 1/2 x 17 in. (60 x 43 cm.)
Edition: 35 plus V, signed and numbered
Publisher: Edition Staeck, Heidelberg
(Schellmann 542)

Page 12

The Silence, 1973
Five reels of Ingmar Bergman’s film of the same name (1963), galvanized.
Reels 1 1/4 x 15 in. (4 x 38 cm.)
Edition: 50 plus 10 h.c. “Beuys”
numbering and title punch-stamped on metal plaques on reels
Publisher: Edition René Block, Berlin,
and Multiples, New York
(Schellmann 80)

Titles of Reels:
1 COUGHING FIT – GLACIER +
2 DWARVES – ANIMALIZATION
3 PAST – VEGETABLIZATION
4 TANK – MECHANIZATION
5 We are free GEYSER +

Page 13

Bruno Corà Tea, 1975
Coca-Cola bottle containing herb tea, with lead seal and label; in
glass-fronted wooden box
11 1/4 x 4 x 4 1/2 in. (28.5 x 11 x 10.5 cm.)
Edition: 40 plus V, signed and numbered
Publisher: Edizioni Lucio Amelio, Naples
(Schellmann 159)

Page 14

The Invincible, 1970
Poster. Silkscreen on paper
33 x 23 1/4 in. (84 x 59 cm.)
Edition: 30, signed and numbered
Publisher: Free International University,
Gelsenkirchen
(Schellmann 307)

Page 15

La Rivoluzione siamo Noi, 1972
Phototype on polyester sheet, with
handwritten text, stamped
75 1/2 x 39 1/4 in. (191 x 100 cm.)
Edition: 180 plus 18 a.p., signed and numbered
Publishers: Modern Art Agency, Naples,
and Edition Tàngente, Heidelberg
(Schellmann 49)

Page 16

Noiseless Blackboard Eraser, 1974
Felt blackboard eraser, stamped
2 x 5 1/2 x 2 1/4 in. (5 x 13.5 x 6 cm.)
Edition: 550 plus 6 h.c., signed
and numbered
Publisher: Ronald Feldman Fine Arts,
New York
(Schellmann 101)

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For a complete list of the multiples in the Schlegel Collection please refer to www.miandn.com/beuys

Please note that the images used in this publication might be of another example from the edition of the multiple on view in the exhibition.

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