

Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee, 1968

Joseph Beuys

Concept, performance and voice: Joseph Beuys
Participation: Johannes Stüttgen, Henning Christiansen
Staatliche Kunstakademie Düsseldorf, 14 December 1968
Tape recording: Henning Christiansen
Digital copy of master tape of 1968, 64.53 min
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In the sound-work, *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee* by Joseph Beuys, one hears the voice of Joseph Beuys who, for more than an hour, repeats the words, "Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee". (Yes Yes Yes, No No No. "Nee" is colloquial for "Nein" in German). In the repetition Beuys changes the intonation of the words. If at the beginning the piece is rather funny and amusing because Beuys speaks with a Rhineland accent, it becomes increasingly more serious and intermittently almost threatening. Through the sole presence of the voice in the room and the uninterrupted repetition, after some time the piece attains a great intensity. It is not exaggerated to speak of a sound-space, a Beuysian sculpture.

The idea and realization of the speech performance arose in December 1968 at the time of the student revolt in Germany, which Beuys very much supported. At the academy in Düsseldorf, he had founded previously the German Students' Party (DSP, later Fluxus Zone West). Although during the following years the party never had more than twenty members, it quickly became one of the polarizing forces within the academy. Shortly before the idea for the performance, nine professorial colleagues had published a manifesto of no confidence in Beuys in which it was alleged that the activities of the German Students' Party represented a disturbance of teaching operations and academic freedom. These events surely form an essential atmospheric background for the making of *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee*, even though Beuys himself never made a direct connection between the two. The idea came to him during a wake, at which a group of old women sat around a table murmuring the same 'sermon' for hours on end and without let-up, "Yes yes, no no". A few weeks later, with the assistance of students, Henning Christiansen and Johannes Stuetzgen, Beuys recorded the sound-work on tape in one take, without interruption. Apart from 2 of Beuys' students Karin Kullerschitz and Katharina Sieverding, there was no one else present at the recording session. During the following years Joseph Beuys used the recording in various installations and performances in which the piece was played back from the tape.

Apart from the political connections of the piece, *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee*, it must also be seen against the background of Joseph Beuys' participation in the Fluxus movement. The Fluxus movement [Fluxus, Latin 'to flow'] was founded in 1962 in New York by George Maciunas and was a variation of the Happening at which, through an accidental interplay of theatrical, musical and visual-art means, happenings were staged according to prepared scores. This action-art was derived from the experimental music of composers such as John Cage and in the beginning concentrated on the integration of everyday life into the repertoire of musical sound events. Against the background of this approach, *Ja Ja Ja Ja Ja, Nee Nee Nee Nee Nee* could also be understood as a musical piece. In fact, Beuys also used the tape in three concerts.

In later years too, all the artists associated with Fluxus worked on forms of art that transcended the borders of art genres. At their events, the artists continued the tradition of Dadaism by demanding the stepwise elimination of the fine arts and the re-orientation toward socially constructive objectives. The group of artists presented itself not in works, but only in performances, protests and ideas. The art-object as a commodity without function, only there to be sold, was rigorously rejected. The live (or life) performance was the focus of attention. Contingency was supposed to hold sway; there was no script for the actions; experiment reigned.

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