

Extract from the catalogue of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, 1976.¹

A monument to the future. Monuments traditionally commemorate the past. They refer to historically accepted events and personalities. They are a means of passing on received ideas, just as unquestioningly as the traditional schoolmaster's blackboard. Joseph Beuys' use of the blackboard as an attempt to transform language and give it new meaning for the future is well known, to find him using the monument form in the context of the academy of the avant-garde might be irritating. That is certainly part of the intention; but it is only one aspect of an attempt to present a total spectrum of ideas in a work, radiating out from a central point like roads leading out from a monument. The spectrum includes elements of autobiography and history, brings together experience of the past with the pain of the present and an aspiration for the future, together with the will to transform matter that already exists and give it new meaning. Many have passed by the monument in the Cleves of Beuys' childhood from which Tram stop takes its impulse; few have ever seen it.

The elements of Tram stop. There are three main elements in Tram stop, all made of iron, and describing three main directions that relate to air, earth and water. The monument itself rises vertically from the ground. Round the upright barrel of a field cannon are clustered four primitive seventeenth-century mortar bombs, their tops, like the cannon barrel, cast and transformed in proportion and surface from the original monument in Cleves. Above the cannon, emerging from it, is the head of a man, modelled by Beuys in 1961 with Tram stop in mind. His expression is pained, yet at the same time as elusive as his character. part Celt. part martial Roman, part ordinary worker, somehow archaic, heroic and yet not at all, both active and passive.

Past the monument runs a tramline, a horizontal element along the earth's surface that bends slightly and curves gently, coming up from below the surface and running down into it again. If it were extended, this curve would reach far into the Venetian lagoon, and then on to describe a circle. As it is, the centre of its curve corresponds to one of the radial points of the monument.

On another radial axis is a bored hole, sunk down to the water of the lagoon below, and then on, 25 metres deep in all, so that it becomes an iron tube full of cold water (ein rore vol kalt wasser). It makes a topographical link between the geological relationship of land above and water below in Beuys' native Cleves, on the Dutch border, and the lagoons of Venice. Running down the length of the bore hole is an

¹ From Caroline Tisdall. *Joseph Beuys*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1979, p. 242.

iron bar, bent horizontally at the surface, then vertically upwards a schematic echo of the three main directions in Tram stop. Close by lies the heap of rubble extracted when the hole was sunk.

Autobiography: Childhood and Cleves, This is not so much a recollection of childhood as the carrying out of a childhood intuition. As a five-year-old, Beuys would get on and off the tram at this point and cross over to sit on one of the low iron shapes beneath the column. He did not know what they were, but their mystery told him they could only be something good. The forms interested him, not the details, and he probably never noticed that the mouth of the cannon was a dragon's jaw. Local lore, passed on through oral tradition, had it that the monument was something to do with someone's folly ... an Iron Man ... some cult. What attracted the child was an intuition of history and time, and the presence of something that nobody noticed. The relationship of the monument to the tram line passing by was something that only a child could grasp. Then there was the sense that both monument and tramline belonged to the same element: iron. Yet one was rough, rusting and immobile, the other gleaming smooth, skating over the earth and sparking as the trams skated over it.