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Beuys Brown and Klein Blue

Yves Klein's (1928–1962) exposure to the German art world lasted four years – from his first one-man show at Galerie Alfred Schmela in Dusseldorf in January 1957, to his solo exhibition at Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld under Paul Wember in January 1961. Klein introduced the concept of monochromy to Germany, and was thus a decisive inspiration to the art avant-garde on the Rhine. The third evening exhibition at Otto Piene's Düsseldorf studio in 1961 was titled *The Red Picture* and dedicated to one sole colour. Much has been said about the influence of Klein and his concept of monochromy on this exhibition, which is seen as the birth of ZERO, and on the artists in this group.¹ That Klein was also a decisive catalyst for Joseph Beuys – as is my thesis – can also be established by the two artists' specific use of colour. Beuys responded to the blue in Yves Klein's work with a colour based on his own understanding of art: brown, which in the early 1960s became as characteristic of his work as blue was for Klein. A comparative look at colour in their work provides a key to their respective conceptions of art and points to a hidden kinship.

Krefeld and the French Tradition of Peinture

Although Joseph Beuys and Yves Klein never met in person – as far as is recorded – they are linked by the special importance that the city of Krefeld and the Kaiser Wilhelm Museum had for them: for Beuys, as a son of Krefeld, at the beginning of his career, and for the Frenchman as the location of his first and only museum exhibition during his lifetime.²

1 Alongside Heinz Mack and Otto Piene, forty-five artists participated in the third ZERO exhibition, including for the first time Günther Uecker. The first issue of the *ZERO* magazine, edited by Piene and Mack, included contributions by among others Yves Klein, Konrad Klapheck and Piene. Cf. *ZERO – Internationale Künstler-Avantgarde der 50er/60er Jahre*, exh. cat. museum kunst palast, Düsseldorf 2006, p. 275.

2 Joseph Beuys's participation in the group shows mounted by Paul Wember with artists from Krefeld and the Lower Rhine (1949–1958) was important for his entry into the art scene. His first solo museum shows were not however put on by his erstwhile champion Paul Wember and the Krefeld Kunstmuseum, but by Museum Abteiberg in Mönchengladbach under the direction of Johannes Cladders, who had previously

The Kaiser Wilhelm Museum had already dedicated a show to colour in 1928. Apart from works by French Impressionists, the Fauves, and the Cubists, it also contained a section on art and science that presented various colour theories. Among the artists whose works were shown were Georges Braque, Robert Delaunay, Juan Gris, Wassily Kandinsky, Claude Monet, Pablo Picasso, and Paul Signac.

In his comprehensive book *Kunst in Krefeld*, Paul Wember, the trail-blazing director of the Krefelder Kunstmuseen from 1947 to 1975, describes the exhibition as one of the most important mounted by his predecessor Max Creutz, who was director from 1922 to 1932.³ It is clear from Wember's observations that Creutz considered that the French had made the largest contribution to developing what is termed classic Modernism, thus placing himself in line with the main stream of thought in art history. Central to this was the focus on colour, which was regarded as one of the foremost achievements of recent French painting, in particular Impressionism. The lecture series by art historian Max Imdahl at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum on the role of French painting from the seventeenth century to the present gave its name to one of the chief lines of research carried out at the art history institute, which Imdahl directed from the 1960s to the 1980s.⁴ Looking at the epochs marked by Le Brun, De Piles, Delacroix, Chevreuil and Delaunay, Imdahl elucidated his thesis of the progressive deconceptualisation ('Entbegrifflichung') of seeing through the world of colour unleashed by the painting. In his view, it was the arrival of scientific, physiological laws of colour, such as the chemist and colour theorist Michel Eugène Chevreuil systematised with his colour wheel in 1839, that led in France

worked for Wember in 1967. The latter acquired from this exhibition the installation *Barraque D'Dull Odde* (1961–1967) for the Helga and Walther Lauffs Collection and the Krefeld museum.

3 Cf. Paul Wember, *Kunst in Krefeld. Öffentliche und private Kunstsammlungen*, Ostfildern 1982. Max Creutz was director of the Kaiser Wilhelm Museums in Krefeld from 1922 to 1931. Among the artists whose works Creutz exhibited and acquired for the collection in Krefeld were the painters of the Blauer Reiter and the Brücke, and the Rhenish expressionists August and Helmuth Macke, Heinrich Campendonk, Heinrich Nauen, and Wilhelm Lehbruck. Much that Creutz acquired was confiscated from 1933 onward in the "purgés" performed by the Nazi regime.

4 "The development of colour in painting [is] a historical event in the genesis of non-representational art [...]." Max Imdahl, "Die Rolle der Farbe in der neueren französischen Malerei", in Imdahl, *Reflexion, Theorie, Methode. Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 3, ed. Gottfried Boehm, Frankfurt am Main 1996, pp. 141–195, here p. 142.

to the non-objective art practised by artists like Delaunay. With his abstract *Circular Forms* from 1912, Delaunay produced the first non-objective works in French painting – making colour and light the sole medium of his art. His discovery and use of the possibilities opened up by the simultaneous effect of colours had a great influence on the Blauer Reiter group in Germany, whose painters included the Krefeld artist Heinrich Campendonk and more broadly the Rhenish Expressionists Helmuth Macke and Heinrich Nauen. These artists directed their attention above all to charting the appearance and expressive potential of colour. Campendonk devised the poster for the 1928 exhibition on colour, with a design and a use of blue, red and yellow that was clearly inspired by Delaunay's *Disque simultané*.

The local artists' involvement in the new developments in French painting and the colour discourse fell on fertile soil in Krefeld, prepared by keen collectors who supported the advance of Modernism not only in painting and sculpture, but also architecture. Among them were the silk manufacturers Hermann Lange (1874–1942) and Josef Esters (1886–1969), who in the 1920s commissioned the architect Mies van der Rohe to build residential buildings for them in the Modernist style. The textile manufacturer Fritz Steinert engaged the architect Hans Poelzig, who designed him a house in the expressionist style (1929–1931). In an article titled "On the Freedom of the Collector", Paul Wember praised the open-mindedness of the private collectors in Krefeld, especially as regard contemporary art, and identified colour and form as a common denominator:

*[...] as a consequence, Krefeld is admired time again for the ascendancy of its contemporary collections. Because in numerical terms, the main thrust of the collections is directed to contemporary art, and for good reason. Krefeld was and is a city of silk, and silk manufacture requires the ability to see in forms and colours. What could have been better for contemporary art!*⁵

5 Paul Wember, "Von der Freiheit des Sammlers", in *Merian*, vol. IX, issue 2, Krefeld, Hamburg 1956, p. 74f.

Yves Klein – The Artist of Pure Colour

Paul Wember wrote these lines in 1956, shortly after he became acquainted in Galerie Alfred Schmela in Dusseldorf with the work of a French artist who focused on nothing but colour, and who in his first gallery exhibition in Germany showed monochrome works in red, yellow, black, blue and gold on various picture carriers.⁶ Through his knowledge of and affinity to French painting, and through the tradition of exhibitions at the Krefeld museum, Wember was perfectly equipped to understand Yves Klein's approach.⁷ Klein explained:

I seek to put the spectator in front of the fact that the color is an individual, a character, a personality. I solicit a receptivity from the observer placed before my works. This permits him to consider everything that effectively surrounds the monochrome painting. Thus he can impregnate himself with color and color impregnates itself in him. Thus, perhaps, he can enter into the world of color.⁸

In 1959 Wember became the first German museum director to purchase a monochrome blue painting by Yves Klein, followed in 1963 by a monochrome red painting (both from 1957).

“For colour and against line and drawing”

A year before Yves Klein first time realised his concept of pure colour in a monochrome in 1955, and applied with an orange coloured painting for inclusion in the Salon des Réalités in Paris, he already had set down his ideas of monochromy in a small artist's books and a film storyboard. The latter had the telling title *La guerre (de la ligne et de la couleur) ou (vers la proposition monochrome)* [The War (between Line and Colour) or (Towards the Monochrome Proposition)]. According to him, the film presented “a fantastic and utopian view on art history, aiming to show the great, never-ending battle

6 Yves Klein apparently did so at the wish of Schmela, who hoped they would sell better that way.

7 Cf. Magdalena Broska, *Paris–Krefeld I, 1947–1964*, Adolf-Luther-Stiftung, Goch 2013.

8 Yves Klein, cited in Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein*, exh. cat. Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Hayward Gallery, etc., Ostfildern 1994, p. 66.

between line and color that takes place in art".⁹ It opens with prehistoric examples dominated by finger drawings in linear form, after which colour slowly begins to gain in importance:

*Heroic color makes signs to man every time he feels the need to paint. It calls to him from deep within and from beyond his own soul... It winks to him but is enclosed by drawing inside of forms. Millions of years will pass before man understands these signs and puts himself suddenly and feverishly to work in order to free both color and himself.*¹⁰

The question as to the relative merits of drawing and colour, as well as to the evaluation of a strictly linear or free style of painting, had occupied French art theory since the seventeenth century. It already features in Charles Perrault's observations, becoming widely known through his publication *Parallèle des Anciens et des Modernes* (Paris 1688–1696), and ultimately led to the wrangles in the early eighteenth century that is referred to as the quarrel between the Poussinists (classicist-linear style) and Rubenists (prevalence of a painterly style). In the nineteenth century, in particular Delacroix regarded colour alone as real, in contrast to Ingres with his linear, classicist style.¹¹

Yves Klein saw himself as expressly belonging to the colourists in this clash over art theory: "I am an Impressionist and disciple of Delacroix", he wrote in his diary on 23 August 1957.¹² Over and beyond this reference to art history – to the line versus colour dispute between the Romantic painter Delacroix and the Classicist Ingres – the antithesis between colour and line also corresponded to the hermetic way of thinking, as in the intellectual spheres rooted in Rosicrucianism and hermetic-gnostic cosmologies, which had a decisive influence on Klein. Ulli Seegers underlines this in his study of Yves Klein: at the age of nineteen Klein engrossed himself in Max Heindel's handbook *Cosmogonie des Rose-Croix* (Paris 1947), a key work issued by the Association Rosicrucienne. Heindel was a former adherent of Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy who in 1909 founded the

9 Ibid., p. 49.

10 Ibid., p. 50-51.

11 Cf. Imdahl (as in note 4), p. 151.

12 Yves Klein, cited in Stich (as in note 8), p. 104.

Rosicrucian Fellowship. Klein had already studied Zen Buddhism for some time with his friends Arman and Claude Pascal, and was fascinated by astrology. Heindel's discourses on Rosicrucianism and mystic Christianity soon provided him with a theoretical guide.¹³ To his mind, colour meant liberty and vitality, being as it is diametrically opposed to the line, which is the epitome of limitation and death:

*For me the lines concretise our mortality, our emotional life, our reason, and even our spirituality. They are our psychological boundaries, our historic past, our skeletal framework; they are our weaknesses and our desires, our faculties, and our contrivances*¹⁴

Pure Pigment

Yves Klein set himself the task of liberating colour from all that is extraneous to it. Together with his companion at that time, the architect Bernadette Allain, he conducted experiments on the effect of colour at the Centre d'information de la couleur in Paris, and in this way discovered the expressive power of pure pigments:

*I did not like colors ground with oil. They seemed to be dead. What pleased me above all was pure pigments in powder like the ones I often saw at the wholesale color dealers. They had a burst of natural and extraordinarily autonomous life. It was truly color in itself. Living and tangible color material.*¹⁵

Klein realised his idea of presenting pure pigment in May 1957 for his second exhibition at Colette Allendy's gallery. Titled *Pigment pur* (14–20 May 1957), he used the gallery rooms and garden to present three different groups of works.

13 Ulli Seegers, *Alchemie des Sehens. Hermetische Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert*, Cologne 2003, p. 105 f. Regarding the alchemical underpinnings and significance of hermeticism for twentieth century art, particularly in the case of Joseph Beuys, see the comprehensive work by Verena Kuni, "Der Künstler als 'Magier' und 'Alchemist'", dissertation Marburg 2004, electronic publication 2006.

14 Yves Klein, "Comment et pourquoi, en 1957", in Klaus Ottmann, *Overcoming the Problematics of Art: The Writings of Yves Klein*, New York 2007, p. VIII.

15 Yves Klein, *Mon livre*, Paris 1983, pp. 176, zit. nach: Stich (as in note 8), p. 59.

Paul Kamper, an artist from Krefeld who lived at that time in Paris, attended the opening together with the Dutch artist Ansèl Sandberg, and especially remembered the blue “Pigment Room” (in fact Klein referred to the space as *Pigment pur*):

In the vestibule at the front was the gallerist’s desk, from which one entered a lobby with four doors. Here Yves Klein had spread out blue pigment on a sheet of foil that was covered in paste, on which the pigment had been strewn to a height of perhaps five centimetres and blown about by Yves Klein. The walls had been kept white. You then had to walk over duckboards to arrive at the main exhibition space, which had stone tiles and a picture window looking onto the garden. Yves Klein had hung his monochrome paintings there in the main space, and installed his fireworks in the garden.¹⁶

In the pigment space, where pure blue pigment had been spread out on the floor in all its powdery materiality, without any binding agent or oil, colour was not merely experienced with a new intensity, but also seen as part of a three dimensional installation, together with a large blue screen (*Paravent bleu*) that the artist had set diagonally across the field of pigment. This three and half metre long screen was made of five equal sized panels and supported on fine rods so that it was slightly raised from the floor, so as to look as if it were floating freely in space. Somewhat similarly, Klein mounted his *Monochromes* in the main room at a slight distance to the wall. The effect of this was to make the dimensions of the space tangible and to draw them into the overall design. A dialogue with the space also accompanied the three-dimensional monochrome blue objects in the main space, including the *Reliefs bleus* (Blue Reliefs) and *Disque bleu* (Blue Disc) from 1957. Here the blue pigment was mixed with synthetic resin so that it would adhere to the various objects and materials, not least the two and three metre long wooden poles that make up *Pluie bleue* (The Blue Rain). His

¹⁶ Paul Kamper in a telephone conversation with the author, 7.5.2009, Archiv Adolf-Luther-Stiftung, Krefeld. Cf. also Stich (as in note 8), p. 91 ff., who gives a detailed description and photograph of the object exhibited by Colette Allendy. Stich also describes the room *Pigment pur*.

Tapisserie bleu (Blue Tapestry) from 1957 had been made, on the other hand, by Marguerite Luginbühl with blue thread.¹⁷ The overall use of monochrome blue turned the installation into a total picture.

Klein had also prepared a short firework installation in the garden for the evening of the opening. Titled *Le feu de bengale bleu, ou le tableau d'une minute, ou le tableau qui parle après dans le souvenir*, it consisted of an easel with a blue painted wooden panel and, affixed to them, a number of fireworks that produced a blue light. For one minute blue Bengal flares blazed in such a way that the blue flame seemed to be disembodied and free of the material vehicle.

With this exhibition Yves Klein set out on what at that time were radically new paths in colour, for in his hands it was no longer a means of representation in painting, but instead an autonomous artistic substance that he combined with a wide range of forms and materials: as powdered pigment, the *prima materia* as it were of painting, as colour mixed with synthetic resin for monochrome panels and objects, as blue threads woven together as a tapestry, and as the ephemeral, immaterial manifestation of a firework or a gas flame. This amalgam of colour with various substances demonstrates the change and transformation of the material world, which can be interpreted as essentially an alchemistic procedure. The goal of such procedures is ultimately to resolve the material object into its spiritual substance, as Yves Klein said in a lecture he gave on 3 June 1959 at the Sorbonne with the title "The evolution of art toward the immaterial". Referring to a passage in Gaston Bachelard's essay *L'Air et les songes. Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement* (*Air and Dreams: An Essay on the Imagination of Movement*), Klein explained:

There is an imaginary beyond, a pure beyond, one without a within, in which Bachelard's beautiful sentence resides: "First there is nothing, then there is a deep nothing, then a blue depth."¹⁸

17 For this and other objects at the exhibition at Colette Allendy see Stich (as in note 8), p. 92 f.

18 Yves Klein, cited in *Kaleidoskop einer Farbe. Blau: gedankendämmerungslängs*, exh. cat. Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg 1990, p. 84. On his decision for the colour blue see Gaston Bachelard, *L'Air et les songes. Essai sur l'imagination du mouvement*, Paris 1943. Over and beyond the aspects concerning the psychology and physiology of perception, blue also has wide ranging significance in the symbolism of colours and materials. Klein associated I.K.B. with the (pure) "blue blood of sensibility", following Bachelard

A wide variety of different expressions for the process of progressive dematerialisation can be found in Klein's work over the years: the release of the colour from the binding agent, and the work with dematerialised materials such as the elements fire (Fire Pictures), water (Rain Sculptures), air (Air Architecture) and dust (Cosmogonies).¹⁹ Ultimately this all led to a demonstration of nothingness, the void of a white space. His exhibition at Colette Allendy in 1957 already featured an empty space on the upper storey as part of his concept. Then a year later, 1958, Yves Klein's show *Le Vide*, this time at Galerie Iris Clert, consisted of nothing but an empty white gallery. "Although it was a room painted totally in white, the artist spoke of an extraordinarily intense experience of blue: it was true blue, the blue of the blue depths of space."²⁰ This was because Klein wanted to demonstrate the idea of a development from blue – a visible, tangible colour – via white to immaterialised blue.²¹

Four years later Klein installed an empty white room, also with the name *Le Vide*, in Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld. — this time an enclosed space incorporated into a suite of exhibition spaces done variously in blue, pink and gold. According to the artist, the empty white space presented "a pictorial climate of the sensibility of immaterialised blue [...] Color-space that is not visible but within which one is impregnated".²²

In the diversity of objects he showed, as well as the different ways he themed colour, the show at Colette Allendy's 1957 (14–20 May) differed strongly from the parallel exhibition Klein mounted in Paris (10–25 May 1957) at Galerie Iris Clert. In the sole space at Iris Clert's Klein showed monochrome paintings, all in the same ultramarine, and a blue sponge sculpture. The opening, which at Colette Allendy's had culminated in fireworks, was celebrated at Iris Clert by two events:

or more importantly the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley whom Bachelard cited in his 1959 lecture at the Sorbonne ("The blood of sensibility is blue,"). Cf. Stich (as in note 8), p. 152.

19 According to Ulli Seegers, such processes of dematerialisation must be grasped in light of the hermeticism of the Rosicrucians and their "negative view of the material world". Cf. Seegers (as in note 13), p. 105.

20 Ibid., p. 117: Klein, unpublished section of *Mon Livre*.

21 Klein, "Préparation et présentation de l'exposition du 28 avril chez Iris Clert," in *Le dépassement de la problématique de l'art*, p.6, cited in Stich (as in note 8), p. 136.

22 Ibid. p.136

first the artist and the gallery guests let a thousand and one blue balloons ascend into the sky. Afterwards came the first public performance of Klein's *Symphonie Monoton-Silence* from 1947. "The composer Pierre Henry, known for his concrete and phonic music, had tape-recorded the one-note sound composition, and it was played in the gallery as a musical complement to the monochrome paintings."²³

Colour as an Attribute of the Artist's Personality

Yves Klein sent out a post card invite for the two exhibitions, franked with a blue stamp. After the exhibitions in Paris, which were preceded by an exhibition purely in monochrome blue at Galleria Apollinaire in Milan titled *Proposte monocrome, epoca blu* (Monochrome Propositions, Blue Epochs, 2–12 January 1957), Klein had established a shade of blue as his trademark. More than that, he wanted to have his name linked with that colour, and thus had it patented as International Klein Blue, or I.K.B. for short.²⁴ I.K.B. is a dark ultramarine made with a very specific and exceptionally radiant pigment. Why did he choose this colour? Klein related it to an experience he had on the beach at Nice: lying on his back, he saw the intense blue of the sky in the south of France and experienced it as a painting; an intense blue that simultaneously had an immaterial, infinite breadth and depth. His "first and largest monochrome."²⁵

Colour in the Alchemical World View: Monochrome and Fire, Krefeld 1961

After Paul Wember acquired a blue monochrome painting by Yves Klein from Alfred Schmela in 1959, the work was augmented for the artist's solo show at Museum Haus Lange in Krefeld, 1961 by the donation of a gold painting. The exhibition of fifty-four objects, a room filled with a void, and a firework installation proved in hindsight to be a retrospective, because the artist died suddenly the

²³ Ibid., p. 90.

²⁴ Cf. Michael Bockemühl and Michael Hesse, *KunstOrt Ruhrgebiet. Das Gelsenkirchener Musiktheater und die Blauen Reliefs von Yves Klein*, Ostfildern 1995, p. 45.

²⁵ Yves Klein, cited in Seegers (as in note 13), p. 102.

year after. The colours blue, pink, and gold were assigned to individual rooms in Haus Lange in that order. Wember presented Klein in the exhibition catalogue as “founder of monochrome art, of the immaterial, and the void in contemporary art, as well as of Nouveau Réalisme.²⁶ He pointed to the artist’s early focus on the colour blue: “In a child’s game in which each boy had to name the realm of which he was king, he said he was the king of the blue sky. He meant this more literally than his companions thought. [...] Thus at the age of eighteen he truly believed that with the sky he possessed his first great picture.” Wember described Klein — with his involvement in judo, jazz, travel (“he wanted to set off to Japan on horseback”), and also in “colour theory, alchemy, and theatre, along with his affinity for philosophical issues” — as an artist for whom “painting is not first and foremost a question of the eye”.²⁷

In his opening speech, Wember entered into the colours and their staging in the rooms in depth, and placed them in the context of Christian symbolism and the idea of the trinity:

Blue, pink, gold, the three colours in the Krefeld exhibition, are for him a triad in the sense of a speculative theological trinity. Gold symbolises the old covenant, represents the law and God the Father. Pink is based on Golgatha, symbolises Christianity, is love and the flesh and thus the Son of God; blue is the immaterial, it is always with us; hence its non-literal sense as another, new covenant, a new religious era; blue was already there in the old covenant and in the Golgatha epoch. Blue is God, the Holy Ghost.²⁸

Wember’s ideas aim to forge a link between the colours in the blue, pink, gold triad and Christian iconography. Prior to his studies of art history he had read Catholic theology, so here he was able to supply the theoretical foundations for Klein’s mental edifice, which drew on various Christian, Anthroposophic,

²⁶ Paul Wember, in *Yves Klein. Monochrome und Feuer*, exh. cat. Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld 1961, unpag.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Paul Wember, speech at the opening of the exhibition *Yves Klein. Monochrome und Feuer*, Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld 1961, Archiv Kunstmuseen Krefeld.

Buddhist and mystic sources.²⁹ Wember's interpretation seemed to be confirmed when, after the Krefeld exhibition, Klein went on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Rita in Cascia, Italy, where he bestowed her with a votive in the form of pure pigments in the colours of the triad.

Wember's construal led to a sensational art scandal in Krefeld complete with accusations of blasphemy. In his monograph on Yves Klein published eight years later, he re-examined the connection he had drawn and expanded on it in the direction of a largely alchemistic concept of colour. In the first chapter he turned to the topic of "Powdered Pigment and Alchemy" and pointed to the significance of gold for Klein in connection with the mystic world view of alchemy: "According to Yves the Philosopher's Stone exists inside every one of us, giving the owner the power to turn all he touches into gold."³⁰

Yves Klein's work was to have lasting effect on the Rhenish art scene. Otto Piene, a spokesman for the ZERO group, spoke of the artist as "genius personified," adding that it was Klein who "gave the initial impulse for ZERO."³¹ The similarity to ZERO lay above all on the formal, aesthetic level, as in the elimination of traditional panel painting by monochrome structures and the abandoning of the artist's signature. Yet there was a key difference in content and on the philosophical side which, as Ingrid Pfeiffer aptly remarks,

[related] less to the appearance of individual works than to the anti-metaphysical tenor of the ZERO artists. Put succinctly, the goal [of the ZERO artists – the author] was [...] to merge art, technology and science with a primarily rationalist and partly idealistic slant, far removed from Klein's messianic demeanour and search for "universal harmony," or the absolute equivalence of "art and religion," as Mack put it.³²

29 Cf. also Sidra Stich: "As with his fascination with Rosicrucian, occult and alchemical theories, Saint Rita provided a spiritual base for the artist. The spiritualism was decidedly non-doctrinaire and was rooted in a belief in the importance of surpassing limits and conquering unexplored territories. The spiritualism also reinforced Klein's focus on the immaterial." Stich (as in note 8), p. 131.

30 Paul Wember, *Yves Klein*, Cologne 1969, p. 9.

31 Otto Piene, cited in Anette Kuhn, *ZERO. Eine Avantgarde der sechziger Jahre*, Frankfurt am Main 1991, p. 14.

32 Ingrid Pfeiffer, *Yves Klein*, Schirn Kunsthalle Frankfurt, Ostfildern-Ruit 2004, p. 64.

Apart from ZERO it was Joseph Beuys, at that time still a relative unknown, who felt a special spiritual and intellectual link to Yves Klein through his esoteric, hermetic views.³³

Joseph Beuys – Colour as Substance

Various writers have looked at the parallels between the works of Joseph Beuys and Yves Klein. In her broad and highly detailed thesis on Joseph Beuys, “Der Künstler als Magier und Alchemist,” Verena Kuni makes special mention of the points of intersection between Beuys and Klein and underlines the two artists’ interest in Theosophy. During his first years at the Düsseldorf Kunstakademie under Ewald Mataré, Beuys undertook on a thorough examination of the ideas in Rudolf Steiner’s secret lore, which drew on Theosophy, Rosicrucianism and Gnosticism, as well as Goethe’s writings on colour.³⁴

33 What is hermeticism? “Its main features as regard content are the idea of a relationship between God, world and man as mirror analogues, as well as a cosmogony in which the creation is viewed as an emanation of the material world from the divine. An important branch of hermeticism is alchemy, which seeks to make practical use of the former’s arcane knowledge, based on the idea of the essential mutability of substances, with the goal of perfecting creation.” Verena Krieger, review by Ulli Seegers, “Alchemie des Sehens. Hermetische Kunst im 20. Jahrhundert. Antonin Artaud, Yves Klein, Sigmar Polke”, Cologne 2003, in *sehpunkte*, 4, no. 12, 2004. Verena Kuni (as in note 13, p. 541) defines hermeticism as a way of thinking that suspects there is a subtext even to profane materials and everyday objects that indicates a further, “real” meaning to the images, gestures and texts. In his publication Ulli Seegers looks at hermeticism as a source of artistic modernism, taking Antonin Artaud, Yves Klein and Sigmar Polke as examples. Likewise Beat Wyss points to the “esoteric side of the avant-garde” in “Die Kunst auf der Suche nach ihrem Text”, in *Mythologie der Aufklärung. Geheimlehren der Moderne* (= Jahresring 40), Munich 1993, pp. 8–14, here p. 11.

34 “Already as a student Beuys freed his works from the Christian humanistic canon of values and oriented them to the laws of Steiner’s cosmos. Here the concept of Christ and the attendant symbolism, such as the cross, are subjected to different, esoteric interpretations, which is why Christian churches view Anthroposophy so critically and deem it heresy.” Hans-Peter Riegel, *Beuys: Die Biographie*, Berlin 2013, p. 113. As Verena Kuni notes in this context, this applies “not least to the symbolism of Rosicrucian theosophy in which the story of Christian salvation is viewed explicitly in the light of an alchemical path of purification.” Kuni (as in note 13), p. 57. “Thus the fourth of the seven steps in the Rosicrucian Method, which initially is described in keeping with the Gospel according to John in the imagery of the Christian Passion, is described by Steiner as ‘the preparation of the philosopher’s stone.’” *Ibid.*, p. 538. Cf. also note 12, p.57 in the present publication. “Although seven out of nine students in Mataré’s class occupied themselves with Anthroposophy [Cf. Riegel (*ibid.*), p. 100], Mataré was indifferent to if not disinterested in Steiner and his teachings. His diaries contain no mention of Anthroposophy and Steiner.” Riegel (*ibid.*), p. 102. There is also no mention of Steiner literature in Mataré’s estate. Sonia Mataré confirmed this in conversation with the author on 1 May 2016 at the opening of the exhibition *Der frühe Beuys* at Museum Kurhaus Kleve.

Hermetically Staged: Gold

A comparison of two works, *Ci-gît l'Espace* (1960) by Yves Klein, and *Palazzo Regale* (1985) by Joseph Beuys, reveals similar views about the materiality and essence of gold.

In the gold gallery at his *Monochrome und Feuer* exhibition in Krefeld, Klein presented a tomb-like sculpture, *Ci-gît l'Espace* (Here Rests Space), consisting of a monochrome gold panel laying on the floor, with impressions from leaves, a bouquet of white artificial roses, and a blue sponge arranged on it as a wreath. It was documented by photographer Harry Shunk in a photo shoot with Yves Klein:

One pose shows [Klein] standing beside the upright panel placing roses on it. Another shows the panel flat on the ground with gold leaves fluttering down onto it. A third shows Klein lying beneath the work with Rotraut setting a blue wreath on the panel. And in the grand finale Klein appears alone, as if dead, interred under the panel with only his head visible at the far end.³⁵

Above all the last photograph is uncanny in its anticipation of Klein's impending death. Yet it is also akin to a self-portrait of the artist, depicting himself as the "peintre de l'espace" or painter of space with the signature colours of his work – the blue sponge, the pink roses – and beneath a panel coated in gold that looks like a tomb slab. In the Krefeld exhibition Klein had himself photographed by the Düsseldorf photographer Charles Wilp in a different relationship to *Ci-gît l'Espace*, now kneeling before the golden panel.³⁶

As a bequest from his life in art, twenty-five years later and one month before his own death Joseph Beuys presented *Palazzo Regale* [Royal Palace], an installation which like Klein's is installed in a gold coloured room. In an anthropomorphic arrangement in one of the two showcases edged in gleaming gilded bronze, it presents an iron head, a lynx fur coat, two orchestra cymbals of golden bronze, and a shell. The head is a cast of the one from the installation

³⁵ Stich (as in note 8), p. 249 f.

³⁶ Yves Klein. *Monochrome und Feuer* (as in note 26), unpag.

Straßenbahnhaltestelle [Tram Stop] (1976), while the blue lined lynx coat and the two cymbals leant against the glass panes are relicts from the action *Iphigenia/Titus Andronicus* from 1969. The last element in the showcase is the pink shimmering shell of a triton, a sea snail. Along with the second showcase, which also contains Beuys insignia and relicts of the action *Manresa* from 1966, it is set in a room flanked by seven monumental gold dusted bronze panels. It was the custom in ancient Egypt to put inside the grave of the deceased “utensils and possessions as mementos of the past physical life [...] Thus what the person had had in the physical was to be retained.”³⁷ Beuys’s staging in a room decorated with gold recalls the graves in ancient Egypt in which pharaohs like the young Tutankhamun were sent on their journey to the beyond in a sarcophagus made of pure gold, along with golden funerary goods. The colour gold also stands here as an ancient symbol for the power and dominion of kings.

In Beuys’s *Palazzo Regale* and Klein’s *Ci-gît l’Espace*, gold also stands though for the goal of every alchemical path: the ennoblement and purification of the self, a process equated with the transmutation and refining of metals. In keeping with this analogous process, gold is not merely the end point of all aspirations in the material sense, but also in the spiritual sense of a gradual transformation to higher state of perfection for which death is the prerequisite. As adherents of the hermetic outlook in Theosophy and Rosicrucianism, Beuys and Klein would have known these connections, because ancient Egypt and its myths are described in the writings of these secret lodges as the origin of hermetic philosophy.

After he was merged with the Greek deity Hermes to form the figure of Hermes Trismegistus, the ibis-headed moon deity Thoth of the ancient Egyptians was for a long time regarded as a real historical figure and held to be the inventor of alchemy and magic. This was the origins of the term “hermetic art” for alchemy, which is handed down from teacher to pupil as secret lore in a hermetic chain. Such a chain is evoked in Beuys’s work in the notes and lists of names he wrote in the early 1960s: in one list designated as a “Score” we read: “Beuys, 1962.

37 Rudolf Steiner, “Egyptian Myths and Mysteries. Lecture 1” (Leipzig 1908), trans. Norman Macbeth, in Rudolf Steiner Online Archive, <https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA106/English/AP1971/19080902p01.html> (last visited 06.12.2019).

This song is sung in unison, modulated solely by the respective existential forms”, and goes on to mention not only Yves Klein but also such figures as Albrecht Dürer, Genghis Khan, Klein’s artist friend Arman, the French occultist and Rosicrucian Joséphin Péladan, and Joseph of Arimathea, known as the guardian of the grail, and even the nature filmmaker Heinz Sielmann, the Krefeld poet and Beuys friend A. R. Lynen, and the gallerist Alfred Schmela – alongside Leonardo, Bernini, Brâncuși, and others.³⁸ Beuys is not only playing here with the magic and power of association generated by names: with this list of people from various historical eras and scientific and artistic contexts he also echoes the hermetic chain as an esoteric law of continuity in spiritual communities. This is to say the actor must deliberately place him- or herself in the living stream of past, present and future in which the future is no less dependent on the past than the past must learn to accept what the future brings.³⁹

Spiritual Communities: Documentation of the Hour of Yves Klein’s Death, 1962

Beuys took an especially deep look at Yves Klein in the early 1960s, as may be seen from a work he dedicated to his recently departed French colleague in 1962 – a mysterious drawing full of coded symbolism and titled *Dokumentation zur Todesstunde von Yves Klein*.⁴⁰ No real sense can be made at first from the quickly sketched scriptural ciphers done in pencil and charcoal on crumpled brownish waste paper, and from the patches of opaque white oil paint. But if one subscribes to a view of things that includes analogical reasoning and the arcane encryption of hermeticism, the signs and colours on this sheet point to the

38 This text from 1962 designated “Score” was printed in the magazine *Hvedekorn*, no. 5, 1966, p. 166. It is also in the Beuys showcase, room 5, Hessisches Landesmuseum Darmstadt. See also the illustration in *Joseph Beuys. Block Beuys*, Munich 1990, p.190.

39 Cf. Rudolf Steiner, “The Human Soul in Life and Death”, Berlin 1914, trans. unknown, Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA064/English/RSPC1935/HumSou_index.html, and Steiner’s lecture series “Karmic Relationships: Esoteric Studies”, trans. George Adams, in Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA235/English/RSP1972/Karm01_index.html (last visited 06.12.2019).

40 The drawing was exhibited alongside another work dedicated to Yves Klein, *Inserat für Yves Klein* [Ad for Yves Klein], in the so-called ‘Stables Exhibition’, the first Joseph Beuys exhibition titled *Joseph Beuys. Fluxus. Aus der Sammlung van der Grinten*, mounted 1963 at the van der Grintens, Kranenburg, Lower Rhine.

subject of death, more precisely the “hour of death”, and can be linked to Yves Klein.

The sheet is dominated by a geometric triangular figure at its centre, which awakens associations with a set square, as well as with the blade of a guillotine (even if mirror reversed).⁴¹ This is repeated – smaller and drawn in full with black charcoal, along with a black dot inscribed by the name “Yves Klein” – on the left hand side, or rapidly sketched on the right hand side on the horizontal, touching the white rectangle and as if tumbling from the male profile with its sharp pointed nose. Masonic ciphers use a pointed shape with a dot to indicate the letter Y, which appears in both the name “Yves” as well as “Beuys”.

In analogical reasoning, which discerns similarities between phenomena, the set square as a major masonic symbol and the guillotine point to the latter’s inventor, Joseph-Ignace Guillotin, a French doctor and politician and master of the masonic lodge La Concorde Fraternelle. During the French Revolution,⁴² Guillotin called for the introduction of the mechanical device so as to put an end to the painful and demeaning forms of execution that then prevailed. The motive of decapitation is often found around 1960 in Beuys’s work, as in the watercolours *Enthaupteter König* [Beheaded King] (1959) and the drawing *Hogan (abgeschlagener Königskopf)* [Hogan (severed royal head)] (1960). Also the revolutionary who Beuys much admired, Anacharsis Cloots (b. 1755 in Gnadenthal near Kleve), fell victim to the guillotine in 1794 during the revolutionary era in Paris as a result of his radical political and religious texts.⁴³ Beuys, who named himself for a while “JosephAnacharsis Clootsbeuys”, admired him as a defender of human rights and universal human liberty, and created a monument to him in the aforementioned installation *Straßenbahnhaltestelle* at

41 My thanks to Johannes Stüttgen, Düsseldorf, for drawing my attention to this allusion to a guillotine.

42 Rudolf Steiner remarked that “the French Revolution arose out of the secret societies of the occultists, and if these currents were investigated further, they would lead back to the school of the adepts.” Rudolf Steiner, “The Essence and Task of Freemasonry from the Point of View of Spiritual Science”, lecture 9: “The Temple Legend”, Third lecture, 16.12.1904, trans. John M. Wood, in Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, <https://wn.rsarchive.org/GA/GA0093/19041216p01.html> (last visited 06.12.2019).

43 “I knew him already as a child’ said Beuys, ‘Anacharsis Cloots, as he called himself, was the first to develop a proper theory of democracy. [...] I’m a Clootsian,’ Beuys said by way of introduction.” Guido de Werd, “Vorwort”, in Bernd Schminnes (ed.), *Anacharsis Cloots. Der Redner des Menschengeschlechts*, exh. cat. Städtisches Museum Haus Koekkoek, Kleve 1988, p. 7.

the Venice Biennale in 1976 in the form of a head that purports to be his pain-racked portrait. It was a cast of this head that Beuys integrated in his *Palazzo Regale*. Yves Klein's head also looks as if it has been severed in the photograph by Harry Shunk. In Beuys's *Palazzo Regale* the reference to the severed head it quite evident.⁴⁴

On the conceptual level of Freemasonry, Rosicrucianism and Theosophy, decapitation or death by beheading is the prerequisite for entering a spiritual path, which is to be understood as the person's gradual ascent via numerous human incarnations to a state of higher spiritual perfection.⁴⁵ Alchemical thought makes use of colours to convey the incremental transformation to this state, as are found in Beuys's drawing: black as the colour of death, with the contrasting white oil in the shape of a rectangle whose contours are blurred in the direction of the left half of the picture as it moves in cloud-like formations towards the far margin. According to Rudolf Steiner, analogous to light white represents the "psychic image of the spirit".⁴⁶ In alchemy the phase of "whitening" (Albedo) also denotes however the "opus minor," the complete division of the elements in the state of dissolution.⁴⁷ But yet another colour is brought into play in the present work, if only as a written word: red, in the handwriting next to Yves Klein's name. Red as the state of utmost perfection is regarded in the alchemical cosmos as equivalent to the opus magnum. That the colour is only named in the drawing

44 It should be added that the decapitation of John the Baptist is deemed an important event by the Freemasons. He is regarded as the patron saint of the builders' guilds, above all of the stonemasons. St John's Day is worldwide the day of masonic celebration for the St John's Lodge. The website of Stiftung Rosenkreuz in Birmbach, Germany, (<http://stiftung-rosenkreuz.org/>) describes how the physical act of decapitation leads to spiritual processes. Cf. also Rudolf Steiner, "Die chymische Hochzeit des Christian Rosenkreutz", in Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, 4. edition 2010, <http://anthroposophie.byu.edu/aufsaetze/a022.pdf> (last visited 22.3.2018), who describes the goal of alchemical transmutation as the transformation of the human soul into a perfect spiritual soul: "The foremost experience of the 'fourth day' for Christian Rosenkranz is his presentation to the kings and their subsequent beheading." (p. 32) Death is grasped as a new spiritual beginning and according to alchemical thought is on the fourth level, which is associated with the colour blue. Underlying this is the belief that the death of a person as a physical being is followed by various embodiments in an etheric body, an astral body, and as self.

45 Cf. Rudolf Steiner, "Theosophy of the Rosicrucians", Munich, 22 May to 6. June 1907, in Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, <https://wn.rsarchive.org/GA/GA0099/19070522p01.html> and successive pages (last visited 06.12.2019), in particular lectures 2 and 3, <https://wn.rsarchive.org/GA/GA0099/19070525p01.html> and <https://wn.rsarchive.org/GA/GA0099/19070526p01.html>

46 Cf. Rudolf Steiner, "Colour", three lectures, Dornach, 6–8 May 1921, in Rudolf Steiner Online Archiv, <https://wn.rsarchive.org/Lectures/GA291/English/RSPC1935/19210506p01.html>, first lecture, Dornach, 6 May 1921, pp. 14 (last visited 06.12.2019).

47 Cf. Seegers (as in note 13), p. 146.

and not used materially might indicate a state that Yves Klein had not yet attained at the time of his death. In addition, with the written name Yves Klein “his” blue is always present – as an association and as a backdrop to the visual narrative. This means that the colours red, white and blue, the colours of the tricolour, are all present. Consequently everything that transpires in the picture is linked to the events of the French Revolution: for Beuys, an artist given to analogical reasoning, this is a circle that comes to a close, or a chain of people and events, which he links together in this “demonstration” to mark Yves Klein’s death.

The drawing has been done on simple, irregular brown paper. On the upper left margin is a hexagram, a masonic symbol often used as a lodge emblem. In alchemy it symbolises the chaos that arises from the union of fire and water. Remaining now with analogical reasoning, the colour transitions in the substrate shimmer between brown and pale brown and ochre, and can be seen as indicating something processual, a motion or even the dissolution and volatilisation that occurs in ochre. This is accompanied by an impression of upward motion, as Beuys achieved in another drawing at that time, *Aufsteigendes Färbild* [= Ascending Dye Picture] (1958),⁴⁸ where the brown watercolours gradually lighten as they reach the upper picture margin. Upward and downward motion can be interpreted in analogical reasoning as spiritualisation and materialisation: the former as spiritualisation and thus as the relinquishing of the material world in favour of a spiritual state; downward motion, indicated here by the arrow pointing down in *Demonstration zur Todesstunde von Yves Klein*, as a process of materialisation – a process ascribed to death.

48 Ill. in *Joseph Beuys, Wasserfarben / Watercolours, 1936–1963*, Berlin 1975, p. 77.

The Colour Brown

Turning now to the physical employment of colour, Yves Klein's influence on Beuys can be detected even since Klein's monochrome presentations at Galerie Schmela in 1957 and Haus Lange in Krefeld in 1961: since the end of the 1950s an opaque brown colour appears in Beuys's work, which he himself termed floor paint or brown cross paint. Like the materials fat and felt, the colour became a kind of distinguishing mark for him as an artist.⁴⁹

A change in Beuys's use of colour can be seen in the early 1960s, especially in his depictions of women. *Aktrice* [Actress] dates from 1961.⁵⁰ The figure has been done in reddish brown floor paint and seems to differ in intention from his depictions of women in the early 1950s, which were done in blood and substances which may be associated with it, such as iodine or ferric chloride, or even using oxidising colorants such as wood stain. While these colours are transparent and applied in liquid form, and thus seem to stream through the women's bodies with a kind of circulatory dynamism, the effect created by the *Aktrice* figure in reddish brown oils is fundamentally different. The figure is smooth, unmodulated, while "the concrete thickness of the dryly applied oil paint"⁵¹ and its opacity disallow any notion of a bodily interior. Also missing here is an autonomous physical frame done with pencil lines, which could be filled like

49 When Beuys was invited in 1963 to the Berges furniture store in Dusseldorf in connection with the exhibition and action by Gerhard Richter and Konrad Lueg, *Leben mit Pop – Eine Demonstration für den kapitalistischen Realismus*, he hung his typical attire – hat, waistcoat, jeans and raised shoes – on a coat rack and pasted notes on them bearing crosses in brown oil paint. For Beuys, his clothes and brown crosses were attributes of his artist's personality, much as Yves Klein laid claim to a colour concept with his "International Klein Blue" (I.K.B.). See *Leben mit Kunst. Reiner Ruthenbeck als Dokumentar Fotograf*, exh. cat. in the series spot on, Museum Kunstpalast, Düsseldorf, 20 April to 11 August 2013, Nuremberg 2013. Subsequent to a recently conducted pigment study, Beuys's use of his brown cross paint can be precisely dated. The chief components of the paint in the early brown cross works, designated paint category 1, whose use can be dated from 1957 to 1966, are iron oxide (which is likewise found in blood), and chrome and zinc compounds. The category 2 paint used for his later brown cross works contains only iron compounds. Its first appearance in the examined works is in a piece from 1968/1969, and it is consistently found up until the most recent work that was examined, which dates from 1985. All the category 2 works in the study are multiples. Cf. Ole Valler, Krzysztof Nast, Barbara Strieder and Peter Scholz, "Joseph Beuys und die Braunkreuzfarbe", in *Chemie in unserer Zeit*, no. 49, Oktober 2014, pp. 30–35.

50 The following observations on the colour brown in Joseph Beuys's early works draw on the updated, revised and abridged version of the author's M.A. thesis written in 1983 at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum under Max Imdahl.

51 Cf. Martin Kunz, "Christus, Kreuz und Braunkreuz", in *Joseph Beuys. Spuren in Italien*, exh. cat. Kunstmuseum Luzern 1979, unpag.

a container with fluid colours. Instead the flat, thickly applied paint creates the impression that the actual figure is concealed behind this powerful, outsize silhouette.

In a work from the same period, *Zukünftige Frau des Sohnes II* [The Son's Future Wife II] (1961), which although done in grey oil paint has the stylistic features of the earlier *Aktrice* as regard the density and opaqueness of the paint, a small piece of chamois colour paper has been gummed to the woman's pelvic region bearing a side view of a female torso in pencil. The pale paper contrasts with the dark background. What remains mere speculation in *Aktrice* – that the oil paint is keeping something hidden from sight – becomes certainty in *Zukünftige Frau des Sohnes II* because the collage element can be read as an opening that grants a view of what otherwise is concealed. Using paint to cover over, as in these two pieces, characterises many of Beuys's works in oils.

In some of the drawings titled *Braunkreuz* [Brown Cross] Beuys has spread the brown paint out over the surface until it almost covers the sheet. In *Braunkreuz mit Transmission* [Brown Cross with Transmission] (1961) the elided section top right reveals a pencil drawing of a "transmission machine", according to Beuys, a device for transmitting power and energy. This motif points to the importance of brown paint in the sense of a warm wrapper or energy store, as represented in his sculptural works during the 1960s by the material felt. For Beuys the stored energy or warmth is not "physical warmth": "I was thinking of a very different warmth, what I meant was spiritual warmth or evolutionary warmth, or an evolutionary beginning [...] So basically: warmth as an evolutionary principle."⁵² Something new can emerge when above all it is protected from environmental influences. That is the function of felt as an insulator, and also of brown floor paint. It covers up, protects and insulates so that energies can develop unhindered and be brought to effect, "conveyed" or "transmitted" at the required moment.

⁵² Joseph Beuys, cited in Karlheinz Nowald, "Realität/Beuys/Realität", in *Realität, Realismus, Realität*, exh. cat. Von-der-Heydt-Museum Wuppertal, Haus am Waldsee, Berlin, Kunsthalle zu Kiel, Wuppertal 1972, p. 116.

The origin of the brown cross works goes back to cross-shaped bundles of old, tied up newspapers that Beuys coated with brown paint, producing brown crosses on newspaper bundles. Beuys spoke of these objects as “batteries”, which stored as it were the spiritual work and energy of our times: “A compact battery of ideas. If this bundle of newspapers was all that survived from our century, it would still convey more information about our culture and society than has been handed down from many previous centuries.”⁵³

As Martin Kunz notes, the battery character is also made tangible by concrete physical aspects: “The newspaper bundle presents itself as a compacted body rendered into a cross by the brown layer. Without knowing any of Beuys’s theory, we can experience the following: compressing the material requires force which effects a counter-force, energy, in the compressed material, which it stores.”⁵⁴

This notion that counter-forces are engendered in the material as it is compressed by the encompassing energies of the cord, and are stored as in a battery as energy, is supported by the brown paint, which seems to weigh down on the bundle and conserve the energy. The opaque brown allows the concrete physical procedure entailed by the act of tying to be experienced on the visual level. In another respect this seems like an act of sealing: the bundle can be put away and stored as a source of potential energy.

Beuys emphasises that the brown floor paint is not just a colour but also a plastic substance:

*I have chosen [...] brown so as to present a plastic substance and thus express something that relates to every form of substantiality, just as I am trying to do with this superimposed red. I simply want to bridge the gap between a discussion about colour and the problem of substantiality.*⁵⁵

53 Joseph Beuys, cited in Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, exh. cat. The Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York 1979, p. 165.

54 Kunz (as in note 51), unpag.

55 Joseph Beuys in conversation with Heiner Bastian, in *Joseph Beuys. Zeichnungen, Tekeningen, Drawings*, exh. cat. Nationalgalerie Berlin, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, Munich 1979, p. 33.

In another passage Beuys talks about the colour brown with regard to the

attempt to create an incitement or initiative to take a different look at colour from the way it is generally understood in our familiar colour theories etc., or colour as a compositional element or as a confrontation between warm and cold, or loud and quiet. So it is quite possible that a lot of people who start out from these kinds of ideas of harmony, as are found in painting, might say that it is not at all painterly.⁵⁶

Beuys's *Farben und plastische Substanz* [Colours and Plastic Substance] (1962) seems like a pictorial rendition of these ideas. Almost half of the panel, which shows paint colour samples with their matching numbers, has been covered in brown floor paint. By covering the picture carrier to almost half its extent with brown paint, Beuys already points to polarity and antithesis. It is the contrast that exists between the brown oil paint in its property and function as a plastic, coloured substance that coats and obscures, on the one side, and on the other the "painterly colours", which is to say the colour values of the paint samples.

Counter-image and Transubstantiation

The colour brown gains its special significance in Beuys's work from the specific context in which it appears, which is to say from the motifs that it leaves "uncovered". As a result, it can stand for matter, earth, a warm wrapper and insulation, but also for blood. Over and beyond such content, Beuys links the colour brown – in the same way he does with the grey material fat and felt – with the aim of eliciting a counter-image in the viewer. Analogous to the homeopathic method of "like cures like," Beuys wants to employ the constant repetition of the same, with "really slurpy brown floor paint,"⁵⁷ to prompt

56 Joseph Beuys in conversation with Ludwig Rinn, in *Joseph Beuys. Zeichnungen, Objekte*, exh. cat. Kunstverein Bremerhaven, Marburger Universitätsmuseum, Kunstverein Göttingen, Munich 1978, p. 8 f.

57 Joseph Beuys, cited in Kunz (as in note 51), unpag.

a bright world, a clear light, and all things considered an extrasensory spiritual world [...], by something that looks quite different, by in fact a counter-image. Because one can only produce afterimages or counter-images by not doing what is already there as a counter-image – always in a counter-image process.⁵⁸

In keeping with this, Beuys's materials are not to be understood literally, by their outward appearance: "For Beuys the real and concretely employed material is only seemingly real, fully in the philosophical sense: a phenomenon from some essential being that is hidden behind appearances," and that is to be elicited by a kind of counter-image process.

The transubstantiation of matter is also being alluded to here, whereby material is transmuted into its essence, matter into spirit. As Beuys notes with regard to the multiple *Zwei Fräulein mit leuchtendem Brot* [Two Women with Shining Bread] (1966):

[...] why does the bread shine? Well, it's [...] a direct reference to the spirituality of matter. The phrase shining bread [...] means that bread, which is the most elementary substance for human sustenance, originates in the spirit, so that man does not live by bread alone but from the spirit. In the same manner in fact as transubstantiation, the transformation of the host in the old church custom. What is conveyed here is that this is only seemingly bread, outwardly so, for in reality it is Christ, which means then the transubstantiation of matter. These things also play a role in fat and felt.⁵⁹

In this context C. G. Jung has some illuminating thoughts about the alchemical character of transubstantiation:

58 Joseph Beuys in conversation with Jörg Schellmann and Bernd Klüser, in *Joseph Beuys. Multiplizierte Kunst*, ed. Jörg Schellmann and Bernd Klüser, Munich 1974, unpag. Beuys also conveyed his thoughts on the homoeopathic method of "similia similibus curantur" in an interview with Helmut Rywelski, in *art intermedia*, Buch 3, Cologne 1970, p. 10.

59 Ibid.

By pronouncing the consecrating words that bring about the transformation, the priest redeems the bread and wine from their elemental imperfection as created things. This idea is quite unchristian—it is alchemical. Whereas Catholicism emphasizes the effectual presence of Christ, alchemy is interested in the fate and manifest redemption of the substances [...] not so much man but the divinity lost and asleep in matter that must be redeemed [...].

Therefore, what comes out of the transformation is not Christ but an ineffable material being named the “stone,” which displays the most paradoxical qualities apart from possessing corpus, anima, spiritus, and supernatural powers.⁶⁰

When Beuys links the alchemical idea of the spirituality of matter – as can be discerned in processes or transmutation – with the Christian concept of transubstantiation, the analogy is perhaps only comprehensible in light of the Jung’s observations, because in Catholic lore transubstantiation is strictly speaking the transformation from one material state to another, to wit the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ. It is a matter of the actual presence of Christ’s blood and body, and not the spirit in the matter.⁶¹

Beuys Brown and Klein Blue

The use of brown paint, which “means the peak of materiality,”⁶² is associated with a therapeutic effect that triggers feelings in the viewer and aims to stimulate her by the key homeopathic idea of “like cures like,” transforming what is beheld into its counter-image. Thus in the works in which brown oil paint has been applied in a flat, opaque manner, the transformational processes are not realised in the picture itself, as occurs with watercolour, blood, ferric chloride, iodine and

60 C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, Collected Works of C.G. Jung, Volume 12, trans. Gerhard Adler & R.F.C. Hull (translation slightly amended), New York 1980, pp. 312-313.

61 Cf. the entry for “Transubstantiation”, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, ed. Josef Höfer and Karl Rahner, vol. 10, Freiburg 1965.

62 Joseph Beuys in conversation with Ludwig Rinn (as in note 56).

gold bronze. The transformation is first consummated in a counter-image, which is to say in an action performed by the viewer: this is included in the transformation. "... on the one hand, curing the same with the same, and on the other the process of creating a counter-image, of producing an anti-world, of using the counter-image to loosen the clutches of torpor and produce movement and evolution."⁶³ This conception also informs the work with fat and felt. Just like the floor paint, the grey materials felt and fat, which are regarded as ugly, are likewise meant to prompt their counter-image when they are overtly themed. This step over and beyond the inner-intuitive image is fundamental to the approach Joseph Beuys adopted in his work from the late 1950s on, when he began to use brown paint for his drawings and to work with fat and felt. This came at the same time as Yves Klein's concept of monochromy, which Beuys – according to the thesis of the present text – responded to. With his brown oil paint, Joseph Beuys assumed a counter-position to Yves Klein and his blue, which stands for immaterial manifestations, the sky, the sea, and the light of the south, and which conveys space and wide vistas. In terms of consistency, Beuys's brown is purely coating paint, as commonly used for rust-proofing. Its visual appearance links it with earth, heaviness, darkness, and also blood.

Beuys's brown and Klein's blue form a pair of opposites: according to the hermetic-alchemical world view, such opposites contain the arcane power of polar dissimilarity that seeks to be augmented and joined together. This polar way of thinking, which seeks resolution, runs through the whole of Joseph Beuys's oeuvre. It determines his visual work just as equally as his critical reflections on contemporary art. The latter include his appraisals of Marcel Duchamp, Nam June Paik and also Andy Warhol, all of whom Beuys chose – in different ways – as his antagonists throughout his career. Yet the work of the French artist Yves Klein, which Beuys became acquainted with at a time when he, too, was going through a period of artistic reorientation, assumed a decisive role early on.

63 Joseph Beuys, cited in Nowald (as in note 52), p. 116.