From Work to Frame in Intermedial References:
Joseph Beuys in Three Contemporary German Poems

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This article focuses on the way three German contemporary poems mirror the movement from the material work of art to its theoretical and conceptual frame (Owens 122), as observable in the *œuvre* of Joseph Beuys. The initial stage of every investigation into the intermedial character of an artistic work, regardless of what kind, always entails the search for markers. These markers are elements that are clearly distinguishable as references to another medium or artistic system. As explained by Irina Rajewsky in her Book *Intermedialität* (2002), these references include explicit and implicit references either to individual works of art (“Einzelreferenz”) or to another distinct medium in general (“Systemreferenz”). The poems that will be discussed in this article are all explicitly marked in that they all overtly refer to Joseph Beuys.

Although Beuys is better known as a performance artist, he was, in many respects, also a conceptual artist who lived and created within and according to the framework of the “erweiterter Kunstbegriff” (“extended art concept”) he developed. The poems discussed in this article all enter this particular framework and thus re-enact Beuys’ own artistic strategies.
Conceptual art and intermediality: a short introduction

3 Published in 1961 and today considered as paradigmatic for Conceptual Art as the avant-garde manifestos for the new directions in art they proclaimed, Sol LeWitt’s Sentences on Conceptual Art include this statement:

Since no form is intrinsically superior to another, the artist may use any form, from an expression of words (written or spoken) to physical reality, equally.¹

4 This 15th Sentence explicitly opens up art to non-pictorial forms such as “words (written or spoken)” or “physical reality”. Of course, conceptualism in art is older than the Conceptual Art movement that emerged after the Second World War with protagonists such as the abovementioned Sol LeWitt, Joseph Kosuth and Donald Judd. It was, in fact, Marcel Duchamp’s attempt to bring to an end the “dictatorship of the retinal”² in the arts by means of his provocative ready-mades that paved the way for conceptualism in art. Duchamp’s work, not least in his reflections on art, mark the first radical step towards a precedence of abstract images over physical, concrete pictures(Mitchell 284f.) in the arts. As Joseph Kosuth puts it:

With the unassisted Ready-made, art changed its focus from the form of language to what is being said. Which means that it changed the nature of art from a question of morphology to a question of function. This change – one from ‘appearance’ to ‘conception’ – was the beginning of ‘modern art’ and the beginning of conceptual art. All art (after Duchamp) is conceptual because art only exists conceptually. (Kosuth 18)

5 After Duchamp, art was no longer restricted to work that is aauratic in Walter Benjamin’s sense of the word. It could take on forms no longer tangible, as they are in traditional painting and sculpture, but rather abstract and conveyed by a conceptual framework that is text-based to a large extent and serves a primary, rather than secondary, function, as was traditional.

6 Conceptualism has changed the face of the pictorial arts to such an extent that it has become increasingly difficult to define exactly what a work of art is, based solely on its physical properties. What Duchamp started is now commonplace: Art is what the artist – and even more so the dominant artistic discourse – decides is art.³ The fact that has remained largely unnoticed in the fields of Interart Studies and (more recently) intermediality is that conceptualism in the pictorial arts has had a profound impact on the interaction between the pictorial and other arts such as literature. Conceptual art, for example, undeniably complicates and sometimes even renders impossible one of the oldest instances of medial border crossings between the pictorial arts and literature: ekphrasis. Ekphrasis can be defined as the verbal representation of a pictorial work of art.⁴ Naturally, when art ceases to be pictorial and becomes visual in a conceptual way, the question arises if and how it can be represented ekphrastically. For example it is impossible to describe a work by Joseph Kosuth in the same manner Homer represented Achilles’ shield in words.

7 Conceptual art is – evidently – about concepts, about the framing linguistic propositions that used to be secondary to the actual, tangible work of art.⁵ Now that these tangible works of art have become of secondary importance, visitors of museums and galleries all over the world are in fact presented with the “relics” of thought processes, conceptions
and performances. In his book on Ilya Kabakov’s installation *The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment*, Boris Groys gives the following account of this development:

> Of course it is true that since the mid-1960s at least, artistic projects, performances and actions all over the world have been documented in the form of installations, and, thanks to that documentation, have been presented in exhibition spaces and art museums alike. These installations always have a story to tell – the story of the realisation of the project or action in question. And pictures painted in the traditional manner, art objects, photographs and videos can all be used in the context of these installations. However, the pictures and objects used in this way do lose their traditional status as works of art. Instead they become documents, illustrating the story being told by means of the installation. (Groys 33-36)

What Groys is saying here is also true for Joseph Beuys’ artistic legacy. Beuys’ main legacy is his “extended art concept” or “social sculpture”, that he so vehemently illustrated by means of ephemeral, sometimes even anonymous performances. What is left of these performances is what is “presented in exhibition spaces and art museums alike”. Of course these documents may have an aesthetic value, but this is not what makes them art, it is rather their contextualisation within the Beuysian conceptual framework that secures their artistic status.

Before analysing three contemporary German poems addressing the Beuysian conceptual and theoretical framework (rather than physical relics of his work), a short introduction of the artist in question will be given.

**Joseph Beuys**

Joseph Beuys was without a doubt one of the most prominent figures in the post-war European art scene. During his life, his persona took on near mythical and even messianic dimensions, largely inspired by his own “self-enactment” that started off with one of the most famous biographical anecdotes in recent art history: his plane crash on the Crimean peninsula in 1944. According to Beuys, he was saved by Tatars rubbing his body with grease before wrapping him in felt to keep him warm. It was this story that became fundamental to Beuys’ all-encompassing concept of the “Soziale Wärmeplastik” i.e. the “social warmth sculpture” in which he himself played the central role.

Like Andy Warhol, Beuys can be considered as the epitome of a development that was initiated by Renaissance artists stepping forward from behind their works and actually signing them for the first time. It was the beginning of the emancipation of the pictorial arts. Similarly, Duchamp contributed to the emancipation of the conceptual effort made by the artist vis-à-vis his material craftsmanship. Although he commented on aspects of his work in numerous interviews, nonetheless, with Duchamp, language games, puns and absurdly connotative titles remain at the fringe of his works. Moreover, Duchamp, often considered to be the anti-artist par excellence, as a phenomenon remained in fact very much confined to the art scene.

Beuys, on the other hand, was in touch – or at least tried to be in touch – with as many forces and energies playing a role in post-war society as possible. Whereas Duchamp withdrew from the art scene to devote himself to playing chess and held his last work, the highly enigmatic *Etant donnés*, in secrecy for many years, Beuys was omnipresent in West German culture, society and politics. For example, as a very popular professor at the Düsseldorf art academy, he founded a “university” (the FIU, Free International
University) and a political party for animals. Beuys moreover can be considered as a highly productive “Schriftgenerator” (text generator) (Szeemann 13) who – not surprisingly – viewed language as a “Parallelprozess” (Bezzola 326), a work of art existing next to pictorial, sculptural and installational works of art.

Although the Tatar story remained prominent throughout Beuys’ career, it is Jesus Christ who was in many ways the exemplary figure for the artist. Beuys’ “social sculpture” can therefore be seen as a syncretism combining Tatar, Christian and other elements. In this syncretic “social sculpture”, the “Christian potential” is regarded by Beuys as an energetic impulse present in every human being. Not surprisingly, Beuys to some extent modelled his persona after biblical and hagiographical examples in his self-enactment. As we will see, this so called “Christusimpuls” is referred to in all three of the poems analysed in this article, albeit in very different and highly encrypted ways.

The Poems

At the core of our investigations of the references to Joseph Beuys in three poems written by the German authors Thomas Kling (1957-2005), Durs Grünbein (b. 1962) and Ulrike Draesner (b. 1962) will be Beuys’ “extended art concept”, his self-enactment and – interconnected with both of these elements – Beuys’ conception of Christ and Christianity. All three of these semantic entities are clearly discernable in the poems Kling, Grünbein and Draesner wrote about Beuys. It is the aim of this paper to show how these poems actually mirror the movement from work to frame or the change of the parergon into a work (Dugast 110) as it can be observed in Joseph Beuys’ œuvre.

Thomas Kling: “Portrait JB. fuchspelz, humboldtstrom, tomatn”

Of the three authors whose poems are discussed in this paper Thomas Kling is the only one whose biography is actually linked to Joseph Beuys’ (inseparable) life and work. Kling spent his youth in Düsseldorf where he attended the city’s Humboldt-Gymnasium and witnessed Beuys’ public appearances on more than one occasion.

In an interview with Hans-Jürgen Balmes and Urs Engeler in 1994, Kling pointed out the ubiquitous presence of Beuys in Düsseldorf during his childhood years. In his poem “anmutige gegend, zertrümmerter mai”, he recollects images of his childhood years in which context he prominently refers to Beuys’ near-messianic crossing of the river Rhine in 1978: “hoch gezurrte lidmarkisn als jemand beuys den rhein her/ überruderte” (Kling, brennstabm 47). Kling’s most evident and, at the same time, encrypted tribute to one of Germany’s most charismatic personalities in post-war years is the following poem in his cycle “stifterfiguren, charts-gräber”:

porträt JB. fuchspelz, humboldtstrom, tomatn
(ca. ’72)
düsseldorf, aufm schadowplatz. Eines
vormittags, im niesel, hinterm tapeziertisch
im fuxxpelz im mantel. hab ich so
aus einiger entfernung hinter flugzetteln
gesehen; da macht ich BLAU eines
vormittags unter-strom
humboldtgymnasium, düsseldorf. ich sachs
euch: WIR BEKAMN HUMBOLDTSTROM. Doctor
august peters, (GESCHICHTE) zu meinem zuspät-
kommndn freund roehle: ZIEHN SIE DEN BEUYS
AUS! SEIN MANTEL WAR GEMEINT.

kassel. installation der HONIGPUMPE. ein-
leitun von sauerstoff, daß honigfluß wir
sehn konntn. mittags, vorm friderizianum
bat ich den lagerndn mann bat ich die angler-
weste um den tagschatten gibst du mir
die TOMATN und kam zu mir sein tomatnhant!

Apart from this poem, the cycle “stifterfiguren, charts-gräber” also includes poems about
the authors Paul Celan, Friederike Mayröcker, Konrad Bayer and Rheinhard Priessnitz, as
well as the artists Andy Warhol and Blinky Palermo, all ordered chronologically according
to their respective dates of birth. In line with the cycle’s title, these authors and artists
can all be considered as “stifterfiguren”, a term usually employed to refer to statues
depicting the founder or maecenas of a medieval church or work of art.

As already mentioned, Beuys’ name is not immediately presented to the reader but
remains veiled at first, as the title only features Beuys’ initials, JB. However, even in the
second strophe where the name Beuys is spelled out, it is used in a figurative way, i.e. as
an eponym referring to the coat the lyrical I’s friend roehle is instructed to take off by
their teacher (“Ziehn Sie den Beuys aus! Sein Mantel war gemeint.”). The last strophe is
the only one that actually refers to one of Beuys’ works, the “Honigpumpe [am
Arbeitsplatz]”, constructed – as the poem recounts (“kassel”, “friderizianum”) – for
dokumenta 6 in the city of Kassel.

The poem is presented as a “porträt”, but in fact what it does is recount three short
eyewitness reports, “viewings” of Beuys in “(ca. ’72)”, “(ca. ’75)” and “(’77)”. They are all
likely to have been inspired by Kling’s biographical background. The approximate (“ca.”)
time indications in the first two stanzas suggest recollections that cannot be precisely
situated historically, because they only exist in the lyrical subject’s memory. They are
part of the lyrical subject’s highly personal oral history. The last “report” is the only one
with an exact indication of the year, which is, of course, in accordance with the fact that
this is the only date that is verified by monographs on Beuys’ life and historical reference
works alike.

This poem is fairly unique, insofar as it is set at the fringe of the lyrical subject’s life,
where it touches upon Joseph Beuys’ original persona. In other words: where oral history
meets the art historians’ “official” recount of Joseph Beuys’ life and work. The eponymous
use of the name Beuys in the second strophe is in fact paradigmatic for the extent to
which Beuys’ enacted persona infiltrated the everyday life of the Bundesrepublik in the
1970s. It is a sign of Beuys’ artistic “stardom”, which used to have no place in art history,
but which has caught the eye of art historians and theoreticians alike in recent years.

Beuys’ stardom was – as already mentioned in the introduction – aided by his determined
self-enactment that included some highly recognisable vestments and accessories, such
as his felt hat, fisher jacket and large coat, often worn with a fur. In Kling’s poem, three of
these “attributes”, the fur, the coat and the fisher jacket, are explicitly referred to. Beuys
himself manipulated his own image, thus turning himself into work of art. The usage of
typical attributes that allow the beholder to immediately identify the depicted person according to iconographical conventions is a common feature of religious statues found in churches. Interestingly, Kling places Joseph Beuys behind a “tapeziertisch” in the first stanza, which may be an allusion to Saint Joseph, sometimes referred to as “Joseph the worker” or “the carpenter”. This would not only be in accordance with Beuys’ fascination for Christianity but could also be linked to the abovementioned “stifterfiguren”. Moreover, in the last stanza the “lagernde[m] mann” and the “anglerweste” appear to be one and the same entity, which illustrates the intrinsical unity of Beuys’ persona and his typical clothes.

Compared to the rest of Thomas Kling’s poetry, “porträt JB. fuchspelz, humboldtstrom, tomatn” gives the impression of an unfinished poem, largely due to the lack of polyphony that is one Kling’s most typical style features. In the context of Kling’s other poems, “JB. fuchspelz, humboldtstrom, tomatn” seems to be a draft, a preliminary version awaiting further processing. Not just the text corpus itself, but the title also seems unfinished, as if it were a short, quick scribble of the most important features to be mentioned in the poem, or the result of a short brainstorming session. Rather than to view the poem as unfinished though it seems justified to interpret it as a work in progress. It is, in fact, an excerpt from something that, inspired by Beuys himself, has taken on the dimensions of a grande histoire. Kling, in fact, combines canonical and apocryphal “stories” about Beuys into a text that can be read like a nutshell hagiography.

Rather than an ekphrastic description of a material work of art created by Beuys, this poem expresses the main concept behind everything Beuys did and created. This concept is the “erweiterter Kunsthimmel”, or “extended art concept”, that entailed the notion that “everyone is an artist”. The poem’s lyrical subject becomes an artist in that it creates a portrait, something conventionally looked upon as a product of artistic craftsmanship. The artist, Joseph Beuys, is himself in the work of art, as it is he who is the subject of the portrait. This can be observed as an allusion to the phenomenal self-enactment that played a significant role in everything Beuys did and created. The poem becomes a part of the “extended art concept” and, at the same time, is an appropriation of the artist Beuys, who has himself turned into a work of art.

Durs Grünbein: “Wärmeplastik nach Beuys”

Durs Grünbein’s Beuys-poem was first published in his 1988 book Grauzone Morgens. It should be noted that Grünbein – in sharp contrast to Thomas Kling – spent his youth in the German Democratic Republic. Before the Wende, Grünbein had only been able to take note of Beuys’ influence on contemporary art through articles and reproductions (Jocks 41).

This poem, though, exemplifies the sheer extent of Beuys’ influence on young artists and writers, as even Grünbein, who was – according to his own words – leading a more or less secluded life behind the iron curtain in Dresden (Jocks 41), was inspired to write a poem about the West-German artist’s work.

WÄRMEPLASTIK NACH BEUYS
Erst als der geile Fliegenschwarm
aufstob in äußerster Panik
um seine Beute tanzte wie
eine Wolke von Elektronen mit
hohem Spin, sah man die beiden
The title of the third part of *Grauzone Morgens* that features this poem is “Glimpses and Glances”. Accordingly, the poem itself can be summarised as a “glimpse” of two birds’ corpses that are digested by a swarm of flies spinning around them like an electron cloud (“wie eine Wolke von Elektronen mit hohem Spin”). The small corpses are lying on the street in what is described as a “Straßentiegel”, a skillet made out of tar and asphalt. The only explicit reference to Joseph Beuys is to be found in the poem’s title.

Analogous to Thomas Kling’s poem, here too a relatively trivial scene is, as it were, elevated into the status of a work of art, in this case a sort of “natural performance”. A significant difference can be observed in the fact that Grünbein’s “Wärmeplastik” does not feature a viewing of Beuys himself but rather uses Beuys’ name and the term “Wärmeplastik” in order to isolate or cut out the trivial scene from its surrounding reality and present it as a work of art. In doing so Grünbein actually copies the strategic use of the signature introduced by Marcel Duchamp in his ready-mades. The described natural (semi-)still-life in itself is “prefabricated” by nature. It is the superscription with Beuys’ name and the term so evidently belonging to the conceptual framework of his artistic work that “installs” the ready-made natural scene as a work of art.

The “Wärmeplastik” mentioned in the title of the poem is not an actual, existing work of art but, on the contrary, a highly elusive term used to describe the totality of phenomena or energies that can be subsumed under the heading of the previously mentioned “extended art concept”. It contains the element of “Wärme” that holds a central position in Beuys’ theoretical framework as it is considered as the main energy source behind everything. The other element, “skulptur”, in the Beuysian sense of the word, refers both to a “sculpture” in the conventional meaning of the word, as well as to the totality of energetic potential that is present in the world and in human society. Beuys believes in an evolutionary “warmth” that is warehoused in everything around us, an idea he expresses through the application of thermoplastic materials in his work – of which tar and asphalt are mentioned in this poem. This evolutionary warmth is present in the whole “Wärmeplastik” that is, in fact, a ready-made “Gesamtkunstwerk”, an enormous, all-encompassing performance. The dead birds devoured by a swarm of flies as described in the poem are in fact a symbol of this evolutionary warmth, a detail taken from the whole of the “Plastik”.

Although less obvious than in Thomas Kling’s poem, Christology is also present in this poem. Beuys, in his theoretical writings and works, partly equates Jesus Christ with the sun, combining in this comparison the physical and spiritual dimensions of warmth (Leutgelb 67). The biological energy set free by the birds’ death passes on to the maggots (“gedunsene Madennester”) that, in turn, develop into flies. No energy is lost: the total energy level of the “Wärmeplastik” remains unchanged (“Gleichgewichtsformel!”). Not surprisingly, the dead birds are – slightly ironically – referred to as “Spiegeleier”: these eggs (“-eier”) mirror (“Spiegel-”) the energy that was set free by the death of the birds. Now, in Catholic terminology, there exists the so-called “Transubstantiation”, referring
to the transformation of bread and wine into the body of Jesus Christ in the Eucharist. This transsubstantiation is, in fact, performed by consecrating the bread and wine. In the poem, something similar occurs in that the present substantial energy remains unchanged. The only thing which changes is its appearance. Moreover, a ritual consecration is conventionally performed by the use of particular conventionally determined linguistic phrases. In the poem, the otherwise anecdotic everyday scene is actually consecrated as a work of art, a “Wärmeplastik”, by denoting it as such in the title. It should therefore also not remain unnoticed that the work of art is explicitly referred to as an *imitatio* by calling it a “Wärmeplastik nach Beuys” (my emphasis). An *imitatio* can, of course, be interpreted as a mimetic concept in the artistic sense. However, it can also refer to the *imitatio dei* or *imitatio christi*, again referring to Beuys’ “Christusimpuls”.

30 The ready-made natural scene depicted in Durs Grünbein’s poem is denoted by Joseph Beuys’ theoretical framework, the “extended art concept”, in which it is inscribed by means of the term “Wärmeplastik” and the name Beuys.

**Ulrike Draesner: “Beystafel”**

31 Ulrike Draesner’s Beuys-poem was first published in her debut book of poetry, entitled *Gedächtnisschleifen*. This title can be translated as “memory ribbons” and touches upon one of the core interest’s of Draesner’s writing, memory, both in an individual and a collective sense. Draesner’s *Gedächtnisschleifen* commences with the poem “Nachkriegsmensch” (“Post-war man”) that appears isolated, i.e. not within one of the book’s poetry cycles. Because of this, it fulfills the function of prelude, setting the tone for the following cycles. The fact that Beuys is referred to in Draesner’s debut book can be seen as an indication of the status ascribed to him in the collective and individual memories of post-war (German) men and women.

*Beystafel*

Sie sagen, aus gewaltsam getöteten steigen,
Augenblick des Todes, Sekrete auf, kleine
unregelmäßige Wölkchen, keiner weiß woher
und kaum zu sehen, du, jetzt, wo du bist,
haben uns nicht mehr gesehen, seit
vielen Wochen uns nicht mehr
angeblickt, du wolltest diese Reise,
jetzt denke ich, bist du in der Luft,
wehende Stiefmütterchen, blaßlila, dazwischen
postgelb, du schließt die Augen,
schläfst schon ein, ich stehe
vor diesem 300fach heißen Flimmern
über der Aschebahn, über den weißen
Kerzen in roten Haltern halte ich den Atem
an, vor diesem eisernen Bett, verhalte mich
an dieser Opferstatt bis zur Auflösung,
sie sagen, den Verlassenen heile die Zeit,
wie von selbst, aber wir haben uns nicht
wirklich angesehen, haben uns nicht mehr
nachgesehen, nichts, keinen Abschied
nehmen, die flackernden Teelichter,
300 brennende Augen, möchte ich austrinken,
in das schwimmende weiß tauchen möchte ich,
mit dem Georgsspeer das weiße, das erstarrte
Fleisch meiner Hand schneiden, du bist
schon in den Wolken, du istst schon
von einer anderen, schwimmendes Wachs
ich berufe, was eilig war, wer tötet
endlich den Drachen, der uns auseinander treibt
das Flackern der Flammen aus meiner, der Haut,
mit dem Georgsspeer das weiße, das erstarrte
Fleisch meiner Hand schneiden, du bist
schon in den Wolken, du istst schon
von einer anderen, schwimmendes Wachs
ich berufe, was eilig war, wer tötet
endlich den Drachen, der uns auseinander treibt
das Flackern der Flammen aus meiner, der Haut,

Draesner’s poem, apart from the obvious reference to Joseph Beuys, shows similarities
with both previously discussed poems. The scene that is described in the poem is an
intimate one, featuring a lyrical subject pondering the loss or departure of a loved one. As
in the poems by Kling and Grünbein, the content of the scene is in se not an artistic one. In
other words: it is neither a material work of art, nor an artistic performance that is
described. It is the title that actually declares the scene as a work of art. It fulfils the
indexical function inherent to paratextual framings in that it instructs the reader in how,
exactly, he or she is supposed to interpret the described scene.

However, this should not imply that the content of Draesner’s poem and its title are not
interrelated in many ways, or that the title is super-imposed on the actual body of the
text. For example, Beuys’ self-enactment, according to a messianic, Christologically
inspired blueprint, is mirrored in the poem’s ecclesiastic setting. Allusions to the
abundance of votive candles in their translucent red holders, typical of Christian places of
worship all over the world, are repeated throughout the poem in phrases such as “vor
diesem 300fach heißen Flimmern”, “über den weißen/ Kerzen in roten Haltern” and “das
Flackern der Flammen”.

In addition, whereas Kling in his poem “JB. fuchspelz, humboldststrom, tomatn” mentions
some of Beuys’ main “attributes”, such as the “fuchspelz” and the “anglerweste” that
clearly correspond to Christian iconographical attributes, Draesner’s poem refers to this
iconography explicitly, as she mentions the “Georgsspeer” (Saint George’s lance) and the
“Drache” (dragon) that are both well-known, traditional attributes of Saint George. It
could be said that in this way Draesner reverses the metaphor; she goes back to the
original model after which Beuys created his own messianic image. In this respect, the
title of the poem can also be interpreted as an allusion to what may be the most famous
“Tafeln”(tablets) in the Judeo-Christian tradition: Moses’ tablets. The Ten
Commandments on the tablets Moses received from God are in a way replicated by the
artistic impetus given by Beuys’ “extended art concept”, including the idea that everyone
can be an artist. Hence Beuys’ legacy can be viewed as a commandment, as a “Tafel”.

Moreover, the allusion to the self-mutilative act of the lyrical subject cutting the flesh of
its own hand can be interpreted both as an allusion to the most extreme version of
performance art, i.e. Body Art, such as that “created” by Marina Abramović, as well as an
allusion to the stigmata, the wounds inflicted on Jesus Christ as he was crucified. As
mentioned above, Beuys evinced great interest in the person, life, death and resurrection
of Jesus Christ, whom he regarded as a “geistiges Wärmeelement”, a spiritual element of
warmth and whom he – as we’ve already seen – often equated with the sun. Warmth is a ubiquitous quality in Draesner’s poem, both in a physical way, i.e. produced by the numerous candles, as well as in the feeling the lyrical subject has for the lost or departed other, the lyrical you. This feeling of sorrow is extended in the last part of the poem in the verse “die Ausbreitung der eigenen Gedankentrauer”, that can easily be read as an allusion to the “extended art concept”. At the very end of the poem, the lyrical subject’s eye zooms into its own “Sonne”, which, again, is a reference not only to warmth but also to Christ, who is – as already mentioned – equated with the sun.

36 Like Durs Grünbein’s poem, Ulrike Draesner’s Beuys-poem only explicitly refers to the artist in its title. Exactly because of this title, the scene depicted in the poem itself is interpreted from a visual-artistic point of view.

**Conclusion**

37 None of the poems discussed in this paper describes an actual, existing work of art created by Joseph Beuys. In fact, all three of them create their own work of art as announced in their respective titles: a portrait, a “Wärmeplastik” and a tablet. The idea that Beuys so vehemently proclaimed throughout his life – that everyone is an artist – is thus performed in the poetic language of each of the poems.

38 Interestingly enough, Beuys’ own “abbreviated” presence in the titles of these poetic texts is a sine qua non for them to actually be interpreted from a visual-artistic point of view. The scenes the poems describe are in se themselves non-artistic excerpts from reality. Apart from the “Honigpumpe [am Arbeitsplatz]” and the “friderizianum” as the main exhibition hall at documenta in Thomas Kling’s poem, there is no mention of objects or qualities directly referring to works of the visual arts within the text corpora themselves. The intermedial reference, therefore, is confined to the title, i.e. to the paratextual frame of the poems. In the poems, the artistic quality is constituted by linguistic, textual propositions, i.e. by the title that holds a direct reference to the field of the visual arts.

39 In this way, the three poems iterate techniques and strategies introduced by the conceptual art movement. One could, in fact, argue that Kling, Grünbein and Draesner have the autonomy of their own authorship restricted in favour of the heteronomous force of Beuys’ “extended art concept”. This fact is reminiscent of Joseph Kosuth’s legendary work, *One and Three Chairs* of 1965, that consists of a certificate describing the conception of the work supposed to be composed of three different presentation modalities of a chair (an existing object, a photograph of the object and an enlarged definition of the object). The gallery owner or buyer was expected to “execute” the conception of the work him- or herself. Now, Thomas Kling, Durs Grünbein and Ulrike Draesner all execute concepts that are inherent to the Beuysian theoretical framework and – more importantly – explicitly confess to doing so in the titles of their poems.

40 It is precisely in this respect that Kling, Grünbein and Draesner all continue a tradition that was started by Marcel Duchamp and purified by Concept Art in the 60s and 70s. In their poems, they pay no, or only little, attention to the material works Beuys left behind and now presented to us in museums all over the world. What is of central importance to the meaning and understanding of the poems is Beuys’ “erweiterter Kunstbegriff”, or “soziale Plastik” and its ingredients. Therefore, the poems reproduce conceptual art’s
movement from work to frame. They do so not only by focusing on Beuys’ conceptual framework, but also – especially in Grünbein’s and Draesner’s poems – by placing the poems’ semantic emphasis on their titles: on the texts’ own frame.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


NOTES


2. One of the three authors discussed in this article, Durs Grünbein, wrote four highly enigmatic poems on some late etchings and erotic puns by Marcel Duchamp in a cycle of poetry entitled “Posthume Innenstimmen” (“Posthumous Inner Voices”). In a published conversation with Heinz-Norbert Jocks Grünbein explicitly refers to Duchamp as a “Schwerverbrecher der Kunstgeschichte” (felon of art history) and to his revolutionary work as a “Coup” against the dictatorship of the retinal. Cf. Heinz-Norbert Jocks, *Durs Grünbein im Gespräch mit Heinz-Norbert Jocks*, Köln, 2001, p. 26.

3. Cf. Claus Clüver: “Ever since the introduction of the ‘ready-made’ and the ‘found object’ (Marcel Duchamp) into the art world and their eventual acceptance by that world, the status of objects as ‘works of art’ has become dependent on the dominant ‘arts’ discourse. ‘Literariness’ is not inherent in a text, it is described to the text by the interpretive community.” “Intermediality and Interarts Studies” in *Changing Borders: Contemporary Positions in Intermediality*, eds. Jens Arvidson, Mikael Askander, Jørgen Bruhn, Heidrun Führer, pp. 19-37. This quote: p. 29.


6. The story of Joseph Beuys’ plane crash at the end of the Second World War is probably one of the most influential and (at least in Germany) widely known biographical anecdotes from an artist’s life. In a much criticised (which illustrates Beuys’ enduring near-divine status) article Beat Wyss explicitly refers to the art historians that have recounted Beuys’ genesis as an artist over and over again for the past few decades as “kunstgläubige [...] Chronisten”, i.e. as “art-devout chroniclers”. Wyss, who in his article links Beuys’ self-enactment to his past in Nazi-


Translation (NR):
portrait JB. fox fur,
humboldt current, tomatos
(ca ’72)
düsseldorf, on schadow square. One
morning, in the dizzle. behind the trestle
table in a fox fur in a coat. I saw
from a distance behind leaflets;
I was skiving off one morning
under –current
(’ca 75)
humboldt school, düsseldorf. I’m telling
you: we got humboldt current. Doctor
august peters, (HISTORY) to my friend roehle
who was late: TAKE OFF YOUR BEUYS!
HE MEANT HIS COAT.
(’77)
kassel. HONIGPUMPE installation. in-
sertion of oxygen, so that honey stream we
could see. Afternoon, in front of fridericianum
I begged the warehousing man begged the fishing
jacket for the day’s shadow will you give me
the tomatoes and to me came his tomato hand!

11. It should be noted that there is no full stop between the J and the B, as is normally the case when initials are typewritten. Thus the initials are given the quality of a monogram, which, interestingly, is not the case in the title of the poem following ‘porträ t JB. fuchspelz, humboldtstrom, tomatn”: “normales querformat für F.M.” (with “F.M.” referring to the Austrian author Friederike Mayröcker). Thomas Kling expresses a keen interest in the signature as a prerequisite for the status of a work of art. In many of his poems, Kling at least partly directs the...
viewer’s/reader’s gaze from the actual work or œuvre to the signature of the artist, thus mirroring conceptual art’s movement from work to frame.

12. Note, in the second stanza, the word “Geschichte” positioned more or less in the middle of the poem. In German, “Geschichte” means both “history” as well as “story”.

13. Cf. Reimut Reiche, about the historical shift from artistic geniouses to veritable “stars” that took place around the middle of the 20th century: “Picasso war ein Genie, Zarah Leander eine Diva; Joseph Beuys und Romy Schneider waren bereits Stars”. Beuys is here – rather comically – compared to the Austrian actress Romy Schneider. Reiche, 95-96.


15. It was Beuys himself who, with regard to dressing in his particular way, said: “Ich selbst bin in diesem Augenblick das Kunstwerk”. Lavelli, 190-195.

16. In view of Beuys’ christologically inspired self-enactment alluded to in this poem it is interesting to see how Thomas Kling himself poses as a statue on a pedestal on the cover of his book Auswertung der Flugdaten, Köln, 2005.


Translation (NR):
WARMTH SCULPTURE AFTER BEUYS
Not before the horny swarm of flies
ascended in the utmost panic
danced around it’s booty like
an electron cloud with
high spin, could one see those two
naked fledgelings.
It was noon and this evil
chance nothing more
than an equilibrium formula
for two bloated maggot nests
like fried eggs
slightly roasted in the street skillet
tar and asphalt.

18. Warmth should, in the context of Beuys’ work, not only be interpreted in a physical sense, but also in the sense of human warmth; of love.

19. Note that Grünbein does not refer to the thermoplastic materials Beuys’ artistic work is most famous for: grease and felt.


Translation (NR):
Beuys tablet
They say, from the violently killed
in the moment of death secrets ascend, little
irregular clouds, no-one knows whence
and barely visible, you, now, where you are,
we haven’t seen each other anymore, since
many weeks haven’t
looked at each other, you wanted this voyage,
now, I think, you’re in the air,
floating pansies, pale purple, inbetween
post yellow, you close your eyes,
already fall asleep, I stand
before this 300-fold hot glimmer
over the cinder track, over the white
 candles in red holders I hold my breath,
before this iron bed, I behave
at this sacrificial altar
they say time heals the abandoned
as if automatically, but we haven’t really looked
at each other, haven’t seen each other
disappear from view anymore, nothing, haven’t
said goodbye, the flickering tealights,
300 burning eyes, I would like to drain
in the floating white I would like to dive,
cut with Saint George’s lance the white,
the stiff flesh of my hand, you’re
in the clouds already, you’re eating from
another already, floating wax I’m appointing, what was in a hurry, who kills
finally the dragon that is driving us apart
the flickering flames from my, from the skin
from my eyes this dashing forward
over the long stretcher, 300 candles, they say,
the memory remains, 300 burning candles,
the extension of one’s own sorrow
how the red is trickling, how the stumps
flicker, this mad, my licking
sorrow riff-raff, as I’m standing there
as I’m zooming into my sun.

21. On each one of a series of small devotional pictures of Jesus Christ Beuys famously wrote
similar phrases like “the discoverer of the steam engine” and “the discoverer of electricity”,
pointing out the energetic force Beuys ascribed to the figure of Jesus Christ. Cf. Mennekes 12.

22. Hanna Strzoda defines Beuys’ signature, prominently featured on a poster for the exhibition
Beuys. Multiples 1968-1980 at Erlangen’s Städtische Galerie as “fetischisierte Abbreviatur des
Künstlers”. Unsterblich! Der Kult des Künstlers 159.

ABSTRACTS

This article deals with about what happens in literary texts that refer to visual art works, that in
the first place are not visual but rather conceptual and abstract. The conceptual work of the
German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) is founded on a conceptual framework that can be
summed up under the term “social sculpture”. It is our goal to research exactly how three
German contemporary poets, Thomas Kling, Durs Grünbein and Ulrike Draesner approach this “social sculpture” in their poems.

Dans cet article, nous nous interrogeons sur ce qui se produit dans les textes littéraires se référant aux œuvres des arts visuels, qui en premier ressort ne sont pas visuels mais plutôt conceptuels et abstraits. L’œuvre conceptuelle de l’artiste allemand Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) s’appuie sur un cadre conceptuel résumé par le terme de “sculpture sociale”. Notre but est de rechercher comment trois poètes allemands contemporains, Thomas Kling, Durs Grünbein et Ulrike Draesner se rapprochent de cette “sculpture sociale” dans leurs poèmes.

En este artículo nos planteamos la cuestión de saber qué sucede con los textos literarios que remiten a obras de artes visuales que en primera instancia no son visuales, sino no más bien conceptuales y abstractos. La obra conceptual del artista alemán José Beuys (1921-1986) se fundamenta en un marco conceptual sintetizado con el término de "escultura social". Nuestro fin es ver cómo tres poetas alemanes contemporáneos, Thomás Kling, Durs Grünbein y Ulrike Draesner, se enfrentan en sus poemas a esta "escultura social".

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