

tensions of this historical shift are contained in Klein's youthful confession that he began to "... feel hatred for birds which flew back and forth across my blue sky, cloudless sky, because they tried to bore holes in my greatest and beautiful work."<sup>12</sup> His sentiment of owning the sky, the very symbol of natural freedom, is the result of a historical context in which even the most lyrical utopian aspirations to liberty could only be imagined and articulated in the language of an accelerating consumer society. Integration with the simultaneity of space, Klein suggests, would only be achieved by working through the myth of objecthood, as it was propagated within a system of objects. After extended trips to Germany, England, Ireland, Spain, Italy, and Japan between 1948 and 1954, during which he claims to have made monochromes on paper and cardboard, using pastel and gouache, Klein settled permanently in Paris and officially began his career as an artist with the publication of *Yves: Peintures* (cat. pp. 12–13) and *Haguenaault: Peintures*. These two sets of catalogues, printed in an edition of 150 numbered copies on high-grade paper, contained ten variously-colored monochromatic plates, made of commercially inked paper. A mechanically reproduced signature, which attributed the plates to "Yves," was included on some—but not all—of the plates, along with a caption marking the capital city of its production. A supposed inventory of his monochromatic production during his global peregrinations of the early 1950s, these enigmatic works did not physically exist at the time nor would they ever exist in this form. This absence of certainty at the crux of Klein's project, alternatively coded as brilliant provocation, mockery, or outright mythomaniacal falsification, extends to all aspects of his production and opens it to multiple interpretations.<sup>13</sup>

## The Monochrome-Fetish

Such insistence on the paradoxical-pluralistic-hybrid identity of the monochromatic plates, which nimbly toe and test the threshold of multiple categories, is the result of the catalogue's insertion into a system of mechanical reproduction. As a product of capitalist processes of mass production, Klein's monochrome is nothing less than a fetish object, a historically-determined, unnaturally-manufactured, material commodity—a "thing."<sup>14</sup> It embodies—at once and in sequence—religious, commercial, aesthetic and sexual values and desires, a social order in crisis, a palliative that maintains a semblance of unity to alleviate the turmoil, and a heterotopic model of social space. The radicalism of Klein's catalogues lies in their ability to make visible the existence of a fissure within the natural unity of the fetish. The dizzying fluctuation between singular work of art and reproduction, materiality and immateriality, truth and fiction, destabilizes the fetish—irrevocably disrupting the notion of its original unity, revealing its constructedness as an objective truth. With the pulsation of internal contradictions continuously deferring meaning, objecthood is drained of its potency to construct an absolute reality and secure its boundaries. In this unbinding of the material fetish, something very curious begins to happen: Nested within it, Klein reveals, is an ambivalent construct of space. And, as pressure is exerted on the one—the thing becoming more entrenched in its "thingness"—the other begins to emerge from within the same armature. As space appears, it carries within its interstices and its intersections the meanings, desires, and relations once embodied by objecthood.

The glowing-citrus yellow, cherry-blossom pink, tropical-seas aquamarine, hunting green, lipstick red, and azure blue plates represent the first manufactured instance of Klein's colored void. While in 1954 Klein had not yet fully elaborated his philosophy on the relationship between color and space, he allows the monochrome to perform it precociously in these catalogues. As it circulates on a world tour—Paris, Madrid, London, Tokyo, and Nice—the monochrome assumes the capacity to mediate between the field of space, understood as an appendage of the nation-state, and the space of the artist, who comes to represent the historical subject. The monochrome's flow

12 Yves Klein, "Manifeste de l'hôtel Chelsea," in *Le dépassement de la problématique de l'art et autres écrits*. Eds. Marie-Anne Sichère and Didier Semin (Paris, 2003), p. 299.

13 For a comprehensive discussion of these catalogues, see Nan Rosenthal, "Assisted Levitation" in *Yves Klein 1928–1962: A Retrospective*. Exh. cat. Rice Museum of Contemporary Art, Chicago, The Solomon Guggenheim Museum, New York, Musée National d'Art Moderne, Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (Houston 1982), pp. 91–135, Sidra Stich, *Yves Klein*. Exh. cat. Museum Ludwig, Cologne, and Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Hayward Gallery, London, Museu Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid (Ostfildern-Ruit, 1995), pp. 42–48, Denys Riout, *La Peinture Monochrome* (Nîmes, 2003), pp. 16–17, and Buchloh 1998 (see note 8), pp. 86–99.

14 William Pietz provides an excellent study of the historical emergence of the discourse of fetishism in "The Problem of the Fetish," *RES* 9 (Spring) 1985, *RES* 13 (Spring) 1987, *RES* 16 (Autumn) 1988.