

PAUL KLEE

Philosophical Vision: From Nature to Art



edited by John Sallis
McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College

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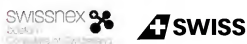
edited by John Sallis

McMullen Museum of Art, Boston College

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Contents

Nancy Netzer Director's Preface	5
John Sallis Introduction	7
Paul Klee On Modern Art	9
John Sallis Klee's Philosophical Vision	15
Alejandro Arturo Vallega Paul Klee's Vision of an Originary Cosmological Painting	25
Claudia Baracchi Paul Klee: Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Tree	35
David Farrell Krell Klee and Novalis: Apprentices at Saïs	45
Dennis J. Schmidt Paul Klee and the Writing of Life	55
Charles W. Haxthausen "Abstract with Memories": Klee's "Auratic" Pictures	61
María del Rosario Acosta Framing Klee's Window	77
Galen A. Johnson Metamorphosis and Music: Klee and Merleau-Ponty	85

Günter Figal	
Pictorial Spaces: The Art of Paul Klee	99
Claude Cernuschi	
Paul Klee and Language	105
Eliane Escoubas	
A Polyphonic Painting: Paul Klee and Rhythm	135
Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback	
The Poetics of the Sketch	149
Damir Barbarić	
The Look from Beyond: On Paul Klee’s View of Art	157
Jeffery Howe	
Paul Klee and the Unseen World: Ghosts, Somnambulists, and Witches	165
Stephen H. Watson	
The Sublime Continuum: Klee’s Cosmic Simultaneities	185
Plates	197
Index	263
Contributors	267

Nancy Netzer

Director's Preface

In the fall of 2008, my colleague John Sallis in the Philosophy Department came to talk about his plans to organize an international conference at Boston College on the philosophical vision of Paul Klee, an artist who had been a mainstay of his scholarly inquiry for many years. He wondered if the McMullen Museum might mount a small display of Klee's works to coincide with the gathering. In a matter of minutes, after hearing the scope of the new research being undertaken, it became clear that the McMullen should try to organize not a small, but rather a major interdisciplinary exhibition exploring Klee's role in the world of philosophy—something that had never been attempted. John Sallis immediately agreed to serve as curator and to contact scholars at the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern. Juri Steiner, then the Director, and Michael Baumgartner, the Zentrum's Director of Research, responded with enthusiasm, generously agreeing to collaborate on the project and to lend a large number of Klee's works to the exhibition. Art historian Gottfried Boehm at the University of Basel also offered to help with securing loans. Meanwhile, at Boston College, art historians Claude Cernuschi and Jeffery Howe of the Fine Arts Department began working with Sallis as consulting curators and contributors of essays for this catalogue to accompany the exhibition. In the latter task, they were joined by art historian Charles W. Haxthausen and philosophers María del Rosario Acosta, Claudia Baracchi, Damir Barbarić, Eliane Escoubas, Günter Figal, Galen A. Johnson, David Farrell Krell, Dennis J. Schmidt, Marcia Sá Cavalcante Schuback, Alejandro Arturo Vallega, and Stephen H. Watson.

Our principal debt of gratitude is to John Sallis. His vision for exploring how philosophical ideas conceived in Klee's writings and lectures were translated by the artist into line and color underlies all aspects of the exhibition and this volume. Sallis's mastery of the field, his years of dialogue with colleagues around the world, and his generous, engaging, and open manner have borne fruit in this endeavor and made it an enjoyable experience for everyone involved. It is with equal admiration, both scholarly and personal, that we thank our two colleagues Claude Cernuschi and Jeffery Howe. We also extend special thanks to Deputy Director/Consul Andreas Rufer of swissnex Boston and to Paul Klee's grandson Alexander Klee and his family, without whose assistance and support we could not have undertaken this project.

Of course, none of this could have been accomplished without the contribution of colleagues at the McMullen Museum, across Boston College, and beyond. Diana Larsen designed the galleries to evoke the aesthetic of those in which Klee exhibited his work. In designing this catalogue and the exhibition's graphics and website, John McCoy echoed the Bauhaus style of the years when Klee taught at that school in Weimar and Dessau. Kate Shugert organized loans and photography, and she copyedited with extraordinary discernment the essays in this publication. Nancy Fedrow, John Sallis's assistant, contributed editorial and organizational assistance. Kerry Burke provided photographs and Jon K. Burmeister produced the catalogue's index. Interns Francesca Falzone, Liah Luther, Lauren Passaro, Molly Phelps, Emilie Sintobin, and Christina Tully helped with proofreading and loan processing. Anastos Chiavaras and Rose Breen from Boston College's Office of Risk Management provided valuable guidance regarding insurance. We are grateful to the University's Advancement Office—especially James Husson, Thomas Lockerby, Catherine Concannon, Mary Lou Crane, and Ginger Saariha—for aiding funding efforts.

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The McMullen could not have undertaken such a complex project of international scope were it not for the continued generosity of the administration of Boston College and the McMullen family. We especially thank President William P. Leahy, SJ; Provost Cutberto Garza; Chancellor J. Donald Monan, SJ; Vice-Provost Patricia DeLeeuw; Dean of Arts and Sciences David Quigley; and Institute of Liberal Arts Director Mary Crane. Major support for the exhibition was provided by the Patrons of the McMullen Museum, chaired by C. Michael Daley, and the Newton College Class of 1967. Additional support was provided by swissnex Boston and Swiss International Air Lines Ltd. This publication is underwritten in part by the fund named in memory of our late, and much beloved, docent Peggy Simons, an enthusiast of cross-disciplinary inquiry into works of art. To all mentioned above we extend heartfelt thanks. ■

Nancy Netzer, Director and Professor of Art History

John Sallis

Introduction

Although recognition of Paul Klee's artistic accomplishments has never really waned, a new wave of interest in his work arose in the first decade of this century. Major exhibitions were mounted in Paris, Basel, Frankfurt, Tübingen, and several other cities. The year 2005 brought the opening in Bern of the new Zentrum Paul Klee, designed by architect Renzo Piano. This facility now houses the largest collection of works by Klee (over four thousand works), many of which were donated or given on permanent loan by Livia Klee-Meyer, Paul and Lily Klee's daughter-in-law, and Alexander Klee, their grandson. In addition, the Zentrum Paul Klee functions as a repository for Klee's personal library and for documents concerning his life and his art. The facility has thus served to spur research dealing with various aspects of Klee's career and works.

In view of these developments in Europe, it seemed appropriate to explore the possibility of an event in Boston centered on the art of Paul Klee. After Nancy Netzer and others at Boston College offered generous encouragement and collaboration, I contacted Michael Baumgartner, Director of Research at the Zentrum Paul Klee, and requested a meeting with him and his colleagues to discuss the idea of a Klee exhibition at the McMullen Museum of Art at Boston College. In June 2009, I traveled to Bern for an extensive meeting with Dr. Baumgartner; he proved entirely receptive and offered both generous collaboration and detailed advice as to how the exhibition could be arranged. At the University of Basel, I spoke with Gottfried Boehm, director of the Swiss national research project "Eikones/NCCR Iconic Criticism," and he, too, offered encouragement and support. After my return to Boston, I began a series of discussions with Nancy Netzer and her staff at the McMullen Museum of Art; two colleagues from the Fine Arts Department, Claude Cernuschi and Jeffery Howe, joined these discussions and contributed significantly to the planning of the exhibition. Gradually the plans for the event began to take shape.

The basic idea was to focus on the philosophical dimension of Klee's work, something that no other exhibition had done. The primary aim would be to examine and demonstrate how ideas developed in Klee's writings and lectures are realized in his works of art. The themes that were to be taken up extend from that of the artist's relation with nature to Klee's conception of the nature of art and of its relation to philosophy.

This range of themes is beautifully adumbrated in Klee's 1922 watercolor *Wall Plant* (*Mauerpflanze*) (front cover and plate 2). The work displays several images of natural, growing things, including most prominently a plant articulated into its several levels of growth. There are indications both of the root structure that nourishes its growth and, especially by means of color, of the sunlight essential to its growth. The picture constitutes a transformation of nature into art, which makes visible all that belongs to vegetative genesis. Within the same frame, it juxtaposes vegetative life to something eminently fabricated and restrictive; in the duality expressed in the title *Wall Plant*, it broaches in the medium of art the encounter between nature and the human, which recent philosophers address as the question of the impact of technology. In addition, by picturing vegetative growth as it does, the work prompts comparison with Klee's description of art itself by means of the metaphor of a tree. It is with this paradigmatic description that Klee begins his most seminal essay "On Modern Art," newly translated by David Farrell Krell in the present volume.

Within the broad scope expressed by the phrase "from nature to art," several more specific themes—

some evident in *Wall Plant*—are pertinent. Most basic among these are Klee's ideas concerning the genesis of natural things and their relation to a primal ground. Closely related to these ideas are his thoughts about the nature of space, time, and movement and about the interrelation between these moments that occurs in works of visual art.

As both a poet and a musician, Klee developed original ideas about the relation of drawing and painting to words and music. In many of his works, elements of script are inscribed along with drawn or painted images, to say nothing of the highly poetic titles that he invented for many of his works and the manifest musicality that many display.

Klee's conception of human existence, attested concretely in his diaries, is, at once, both original and responsive to classical texts such as the Greek tragedies that he read so avidly. These thoughts became paramount after the Nazis came to power, and while they went largely unwritten, Klee expressed them powerfully in a series of more than two hundred satirical drawings produced in 1933.

Klee's conception of the nature of art is to be found through his published essays and his Bauhaus lectures. Yet its most succinct statement lies in the celebrated remark with which he opens his essay "Creative Credo": "Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible."

In addition to considering Klee's own ideas as they guide and are developed in his artistic work, this exhibition and the essays in this catalogue explore the reception of Klee's work by a number of major philosophers. The list includes Walter Benjamin, Martin Heidegger, Michel Foucault, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and others. In every case the question is: what do the philosophers discern in Klee's work and how do they regard his art as complementing their thought?

The following essays explore this broad array of themes and questions. Among the contributors there are both philosophers and art historians, and on both sides they approach Klee's work from a variety of perspectives. Several of the essays explore the relation between Klee's work and that of particular philosophers or philosopher-poets such as Merleau-Ponty, Novalis, Benjamin, and Heidegger. Others focus on the way that certain of Klee's ideas—concerning space, language, rhythm, temporality—are carried out concretely in his artistic work. Still others focus on the cosmological dimension in Klee's thought and works, on his very distinctive sense of simile and metaphor, and on his conception of visibility and its relation to the invisible.

Taken as a whole, the collection is intended to provide a comprehensive assessment of the philosophical dimension of Klee's art and thought. To this end, the essays draw extensively both from Klee's own writings (his essays, lectures, and diaries) and from the art-historical scholarship concerning Klee's theoretical and artistic work. In addition, many of them take up the insights into Klee's work found in the writings of various philosophers and reexamine Klee's art and thought in the light of these insights.

I am grateful to Nancy Netzer for her continual encouragement, strong support, and expert advice, as well as to the very able staff of the McMullen Museum of Art, Kate Shugert, Diana

Larsen, and John McCoy, with whom it has been a pleasure to collaborate. I want to express my gratitude to the authors of the essays in this catalogue for offering their insights into Klee's work and providing thereby a basis for further discussion and appreciation of Klee's achievements. Thanks also to Nancy Fedrow, Marina Denischik, Peter Hanly, Nicholas Sallis, and Jon K. Burmeister for their very capable assistance. ■

Paul Klee

On Modern Art

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen!¹

If I now take the floor, standing close by some of my own work, and speak about that work, even though the work ought to speak for itself in its own language, I confess to a certain unease about whether there are sufficient reasons for my saying anything at all, and also whether I will say it in the right way.

For even though as a painter I feel myself to be in possession of the means, my own means, to set others in motion so that they will head in the same direction in which I feel myself driven, I do not feel as though I have been given the gift of words, at least not with the same sort of assurance, words by which to point us toward the proper paths.

Yet I console myself by noting that it is not my talk in isolation that addresses you, that the talk is meant merely to complement the impressions you yourselves will gain of my images; perhaps my words will provide certain coinages that otherwise might go missing.

If I should succeed in this, to some extent at least, then I will respect the good sense of my having taken up the assigned task of addressing you.

In order to avoid even further the odium that is captured in the expression, "Artist, make art, don't talk," I would like to volunteer some observations on the creative process; during the period in which a work receives its shape this process goes on more or less preconsciously. In my own subjective view, that is the only real justification for speeches by one who makes art, namely, to alter one's focus by finding new ways to observe. In other words, to take some of the pressure off the formal side of things, which is consciously overburdened, by developing a new kind of intuition, and to try to emphasize somewhat more the content aspect. Reestablishing the equilibrium in this way would be exciting for me, and it would bring me much closer to a confrontation with art by means of words and concepts.

However, I would be thinking too selfishly here; I would be forgetting that most of you are probably more at home on the content side of things, less so on the formal side. And so I cannot really avoid saying something to you about these formal things.

I would therefore like to offer you a peek into the painter's workshop, and if we can do that, we will come to understand one another in other respects as well.

Some sort of common ground must exist between artists and others, a place where we can approach one another mutually, a common ground on which the artist need no longer appear to be a matter quite apart.

Where he may rather appear as a creature who, like you, did not ask to be dropped into this multifarious world of ours and who must make his or her way through it all just as you must.

Who may be different from you merely because of the specific means he has been given to rescue himself, so that sometimes he may be more fortunate than a person who cannot create at all, a person who can never

¹ Paul Klee delivered this lecture on January 26, 1924, at the Jena Kunstverein exhibition of his works. A facsimile and transcription of the original lecture appear in *Paul Klee in Jena 1924: Der Vortrag*, exh. cat. (Gera: Druckhaus Gera, 1999), 11–69. The text would not be published until 1945, with the lecture thenceforth titled "Über die moderne Kunst." This translation is published with the permission of the Zentrum Paul Klee.

arrive at the point where he can give things real form and in this way save himself.

You really must be content to grant the artist this one relative advantage, because in other respects he has a tough enough time.

Allow me to employ a simile—that of a tree. The artist has come to grips with this multifarious world, and we would like to think that he has made his way through it somewhat successfully, albeit very quietly. He has such good orientation in it that he is able to bring order to the flux of appearances and experiences. This orientation in the things of nature and of life, this order with all its limbs and branches, I would like to compare to the root structure of the tree.

From that structure juices flow upward to the artist, passing through him, through his eye.

He is therefore standing in the place of the trunk.

Moved and compelled by the power of those streaming juices, he conducts what he is looking at into the work.

Like the crown of the tree, unfolding into visibility in every direction through time and space, that is how it also goes with the work.

It would not occur to anyone to demand of the tree that it shape its crown exactly like its root structure. Everyone will understand that the below and the above cannot mirror one another perfectly. It is clear that over time the different functions in the various elemental realms will diverge from one another in quite vital ways.

Yet from time to time people have wanted to forbid the artist these divergences from the given models, divergences that are necessary to the artistic process. Some people have been so outraged that they accuse the artist of total incompetence or deliberate falsification.

And yet, in the place that has been assigned to him, at the trunk, he is doing no more than gathering and conducting whatever it is that comes to him from the depths. He neither serves nor rules, but merely mediates.

He occupies a truly modest position. And the beauty of the crown is not he himself, but what has merely passed through him.

Before I begin to explain the realms I was comparing to crown and root, I have to confess to some more doubts.

It is not easy to find one's way in a whole that is composed of various members that, in turn, pertain to different dimensions. And such wholes are both nature and nature's altered image—art.

It is difficult to get an overview of such a whole, whether of nature or art, and it is still more difficult to help someone else attain such a prospect.

The reason for this lies in the temporally distinct methods—the only methods we are ever given—of treating a spatial image, treating it in such a way that a clear and plastic presentation of it results. And the reason for that is a lack in the temporal aspect of language.

For we lack the means to discuss synthetically a multidimensional simultaneity.

In spite of this glaring inadequacy, we have to involve ourselves in a thoroughgoing way with the parts.

Yet as we work through each part, where we will already have many aspects we have to consider, we must remain conscious of the fact that we are dealing with a mere part, so that we do not grow faint-hearted when treatment of new parts takes us in very different directions and into other dimensions, leading us off the beaten track, as it were, so that our memory of the dimensions treated earlier may readily fade.

To each dimension that evanesces in time we should say, "You will now become the past; and yet every now and again as we pursue our new dimension we will stumble onto a critical place, perhaps a fortunate place, which will restore your present to you."

And if it should turn out to be increasingly difficult to make present to ourselves more and more of these dimensions, to hold together the different parts of this articulated structure, that only means that we will have to be very patient.

A long time ago the so-called spatial arts succeeded in holding together this simultaneously multidimensional phenomenon. The temporal art of music also created for itself the pregnant reverberations of polyphony, and such holding together enabled drama to achieve its high points; but in the areas where words prevail, and where we must do our teaching, it is unfortunately unknown. Contact between the dimensions has to enter from the outside here—after the fact.

And yet perhaps I can still make myself understood to this extent, that one or other work better lends itself to an experience of the phenomenon of multidimensional contact.

As a modest mediator, who does not identify himself with the crown, I may still be allowed to grant you a view of a richly radiating light.

Now to the thing itself, to the dimensions of the image.

Earlier I spoke of the relation of crown to root, or of work to nature, explaining the difference in terms of the two realms of earth and air and with the correspondingly different functions of depth and height.

With the work of art, which was compared to the crown, it is a matter of the deformational necessity of entering into the specific dimensions of the pictorial. For the rebirth of nature tends in that direction.

What, then, are these specific dimensions?

Here we find what are at first more or less limited, formal things, like lines, bright and dark tones, and color.

The most limited thing is the line, which is an affair of measure alone. Whatever way the line behaves, it is always a matter of longer or shorter stretches, of angles more acute or more obtuse, of larger or smaller arcs, of distances between foci. Always and everywhere something measurable!

Measure is the earmark of this element, and if the measurability becomes dubious, then one has not been dealing with the line in an absolutely pure manner.

Matters are different with tonalities, or, as we also call them,

lighter or darker tones, the whole scale of differences between black and white. In this second element we find ourselves among questions of weight. One degree is more dense or more free with white energy, the other degree is more burdened by black or less so. One can weigh the different degrees against one another. In addition, it is a matter of black upon the white norm (on a white background), or white in relation to the black norm (on a black board), or both together in relation to a mediating gray norm.

Third, colors, which obviously demonstrate characteristics very different from the above. For one does not altogether get to them through measuring or weighing: there where no ruler or scale can clearly mark a difference, for example, the difference between a pure yellow and a pure red surface of the same dimensions and with the same degree of brightness, there still remains an essential difference, the difference we designate with the words Yellow and Red.

Just so, one can readily compare salt and sugar, understanding everything except their saltiness and sweetness.

I would therefore like to call colors qualities.

Accordingly, we have the formal means of measure, weight, and quality, which, while fundamentally different, still entertain certain relations with one another.

The nature of their interconnection will emerge from the following brief investigation.

Color is first of all quality. Second, it is weight, because it possesses not only a chromatic value but also a brightness value. Third, color is also measure, because in addition to the previous values it also has its limits, its scope, its extension, its measurability.

Chiaroscuro is in the first place weight, and, in its extension, or perhaps within its limits, it is in the second place measure. However, the line is measure alone.

Thus we have been making judgments on the basis of three guidelines, all of which are tangent to the circle of fully cultivated color; two of those guidelines apply to pure chiaroscuro, whereas only one of them stretches across the region of the pure line.

The three guidelines—depending upon the degree of their participation—constitute three interpenetrating regions, as it were. The largest region contains three guidelines, the middle one two, and the smallest but one.

(On the basis of this we can perhaps best understand Max Liebermann's remark that sketching is the art of leaving things out.)

We are able to make out a well-articulated structure of interpenetration here, and accordingly it is only logical that we should want to preserve the appropriate tidiness when dealing with these various formal means. The possibilities for combination are certainly abundant enough.

We would want to operate by muddying only when a special inner need calls for it, understanding by this the application of colored lines or very pale lines, or also the application of other sorts of turbidity, such as those gray hues that so readily oscillate between a yellow and a blue tone. The ordering symbol of the essence of the pure line is the linear ruler with its variously marked lengths.

The symbol of the essence of pure chiaroscuro is the scale that is weighted by the various stages between white and black.

What sort of ordering, now, is appropriate to the essence of pure color? In what sort of ordering does its essence best express itself?

In the well-constructed disc, the form that is best able to say something essential about the reciprocal relations of the colors.

Its clear center, the capacity of its periphery to be divided by six radii, the image of the three diameters created by these six points of intersection: these are the areas of special interest on the showplace of chromatic relationships.

These relationships are, first of all, diametrical; and just as there are three diameters here, so are there also three principal diametrically opposed relationships, which we call red/green, yellow/violet, and blue/orange. (Or, in other words, the most important pairs of complementary colors.)

As we move along the periphery, each major or primary color meets its most important secondary or mixed color; these mixed colors (three in number) come to lie in between their proper components, the primary colors, green between yellow and blue, violet between red and blue, and orange between yellow and red.

The complementary pairs that are bound together by the diameters destroy one another chromatically when they move in the diametrically opposed direction and thus mix to gray. The fact that this is true for all three suggests that the point of intersection common to the three diameters, their halfway point, constitutes the gray center of the chromatic disc.

But now a triangle can be constructed through the midpoints of the three primary colors, yellow, red, and blue; the vertices of the triangle would be at the midpoint of the arcs of the primary colors themselves, but their sides would pass through the mixtures of the two primary colors leading up to the vertex, so that on this triangle the green side would lie opposite the red point, the violet side would lie opposite the yellow point, and the orange side would lie opposite the blue point.

Accordingly, there are three primary colors and three principal neighboring colors, or six principal neighboring colors, or three-times-two related colors (chromatic pairs).

Abandoning this elementary, formal region, I come now to the first constructions made on the basis of the enumerated elements in the three categories.

Here lies the focal point of our conscious creative process.

Around this point our professional activity is gathered. Here matters are critical.

On this basis, if we can master these means, we can with assurance shape things so reliably that we will be able to advance toward farther dimensions, dimensions more distant from our conscious involvement with things.

The same critical significance comes to this stage of construction in a negative sense: here is also the place where we will not achieve the grandest and weightiest content, and here is the place where in spite of the most favorable psychic constitution, the one that would take us there, we founder. Because something is missing precisely from our orientation on the formal level.

To the extent that I can speak from my own experience, a disposition may on occasion come to the creative person that will allow him to invite some among the many elements to emerge from their general order, invite them to step out of their well-appointed sites, so that, working with one another, they may elevate themselves to a new order.

So that, working with one another, they construct something one usually calls a figure or an object.

This choice of the formal elements and the mode of their mutual binding, which is limited to a very small range, is analogous to the musical thought between motif and theme.

Whenever such a construction gradually expands before our eyes, an association may quite readily join it, playing a role that is something like that of an experimenter who tempts and attempts objective interpretation. For every construction, if its articulation is complex, can with a bit of imagination be brought into comparison with some natural form.

The associated properties of this constructed thing, once it has been interpreted and named, no longer correspond entirely to the will of the artist (at least, not to the most intense site of this willing); these associated properties are the source of the passionate misunderstandings that arise between artists and their public.

Whereas for the artist it is all about striving to group the formal elements so purely and so logically together that each one is in its necessary place and none gets in the way of the other, someone in the back of the room mutters the following catastrophic words: "But that doesn't look like Uncle Fred at all!" The artist, if his nerves are well-steeled, thinks, "To hell with Uncle Fred, I've got to keep working on this, I need to add some building blocks, but this new block," he says to himself, "is really too heavy, it pulls the whole business over to the left; I've got to add a counterweight over here on the right, something significant, to get the balance back."

Left and right he builds, adding this and that, until the arrow of the scale finally hovers as it should.

And he is happy as a lark if he has had to shatter only a few of the good elements that were there right at the very beginning, so that, with all the added contradictions and contrasts, everything at some point belongs to a construction that is full of life.

And yet. Sooner or later, even without that muttering from the back of the room, such associations can take place, and nothing can stop the artist from yielding to them if they introduce themselves with a name that sounds exactly right.

This objective yes-word then incites the addition of some sort of ingredient that seems to belong necessarily to the object once it has been formulated. It stimulates the artist, if he is lucky, to add objective attributes to a spot that formally speaking was a bit needy, so that it seems as though they always belonged there.

The quarrel has less to do with the question of the object's existence and more to do with any given appearance of this object, with the kind of object it is.

I dare to hope that any person who, when it comes to images, is on the hunt for an object he particularly loves gradually fades into extinction, at least in the region that surrounds me, and that he comes to meet me at most as a ghost who does not know how to help himself. For this kind of person knows no more than the

objects of his own passions. And yet I do have to concede that under some circumstances, whenever a face that is familiar to us pops up in an image, we feel happy, sometimes very happy.

Images of objects look at us cheerfully or reproachfully, more or less tensely; they are prepared to console us richly or to frighten us; they are full of suffering or smiles. In all the opposites that dominate the psychological-physiognomic dimension, they look at us in ways that can stretch from the tragic to the comic.

But that is not the end of it, not by any means!

The figures, as I have been calling these images of objects for some time now, also have their particular posture, which results from the way one has set the chosen groups of elements into motion.

If a calm and self-possessed posture has been achieved, then the construction was striving to offer either no incrementation at all, intending rather to present only established positions on the broad horizontal, or in the case of a vertical incrementation seeing to it that the verticals are quite visible and consistent.

This firm posture can preserve its calm and yet still behave somewhat more freely. The entire gesture can be transposed to an in-between sort of realm, such as water or the atmosphere, where no verticals dominate (as with swimming or floating).

I say an in-between sort of realm in contrast to the first postural position, which is altogether earthbound.

In the case that follows, a new kind of posture emerges, one whose gestures are extremely lively, causing the posture to step outside itself.

Why not?

I have conceded that the justification for the concept of the object lies in the image, so that we now have a new dimension.

By now I have indicated the formal elements one at a time and also in their appropriate contexts.

I have also tried to make clear their stepping outside of their established positions.

I have tried to make clear their coming on the scene as groups, and their initially limited but then somewhat more expanded collaboration in artistic constructions.

Constructions that we may call abstract, but that also may take on a certain concreteness, depending on the direction they follow once we have been lured by comparisons and associations by way of names such as star, vase, plant, animal, head, or human being.

These constructions corresponded in the first place with the dimensions of the elementary means of pictorial formation, such as line, chiaroscuro, and color. They then corresponded with the first constructive interplay of these means in the dimension of the figure or, if you like, the dimension of the object. A further dimension comes to join these dimensions now, one that has everything to do with the question of content.

Certain relations of measure in lines, the juxtaposition of certain tones on the scale of chiaroscuro, and certain chromatic harmonies bring with them quite specific and very particular kinds of expression.

For example, relations of measure in the linear region can go in the direction of the angle: acutely angled zigzag motions, in con-

trast to a more horizontal course for the line, evoke correspondingly contrary resonances of expression.

Likewise, we see very different effects on the ideal side of things resulting in the case of two different kinds of linear configuration, one with firm contours, the other more free-flowing, more dispersed.

Contrasting cases of expression in the region of chiaroscuro are:

Application of a wide range of all the tones from black to white, which suggests energy and a full inhalation and exhalation; or a limited application of the upper half, the brighter half, of the scale—or of the lower and deeper half;

or application of the middle parts of that scale, those involving gray, which suggests weakness through too much or too little light; or a hesitant dusk all about the middle. Those are hugely contrasting contents.

And think of the possibilities for varying the content once we arrive at a juxtaposition of colors!

For example, color as chiaroscuro: red on red, that is to say, the entire scale from red-manqué to red-excess, in a broad or limited expanse of the scale.

Then the same in yellow (which is something altogether different), the same in blue—what opposites here! Or: diametrical colors, advancing from red to green, from yellow to violet, from blue to orange:

Fragmentary worlds of content.

Or: passages through color, through the segments of the chromatic disc, not directly touching the gray middle, but meeting one another in a warmer or a cooler gray: what fine nuances in comparison with the prior contrasts!

Or: passages through color along the periphery of the circle, from yellow via orange to red, or from red via violet to blue, or on a broad expanse, over the entire scope of the disc:

What a cascade of stages, from the smallest step to a richly flowing symphony of color! What sundry perspectives in the dimension of content!

Or, finally, passages through the totality of the chromatic order, including the diametrical gray, and ultimately bound up with the entire scale from black to white!

One can pass beyond these last-mentioned possibilities only by entering a new dimension. What could then come into question would be the place we would assign the assorted chromatic sounds. Indeed, each assortment would have its own possibilities of combination.

And each configuration, each combination, will have its particular constructive expression, every figure its face, its physiognomy.

Such compelling gestures point with special clarity into the dimension of style. Here romanticism, in its especially crass and bathetic phase, begins to stir.

This gesture wants to repel the Earth utterly, and the next gesture actually elevates itself beyond the Earth. It elevates itself by the dictate of forces that hover, triumphant over the forces of gravity.

In the end I let these forces that are inimical to the Earth soar out into the beyond, until they reach the point of the grand circulation; that way I pass beyond the style of bathos and compulsion to

the kind of romanticism that melts into the universe.

Thus the static and the dynamic portions of the mechanics of artistic construction dovetail quite beautifully with the opposition of the classic and the romantic.

Our pictorial construction, as we have described it, runs through so many important dimensions that it would not be fitting to still call it a construction. From now on we will be happy to bestow on it the resonant name composition.

As for the dimensions, we will allow ourselves to be satisfied by these abundant perspectives!

I would now like to examine the dimension of the objective realm in and of itself and in a new sense, and thereby to try to show why the artist often undertakes such an apparently arbitrary "deformation" of the natural form of appearances.

For one thing, he does not grant these natural forms of appearance the compelling significance they have for the numerous and loudly critical realists. He does not feel so bound by these realities, because he does not see in these culminating forms the essence of the creative process of nature. More important to him than the culminating forms are the formative forces.

He is perhaps, without really wanting to be, a philosopher. And if he does not declare, as the optimists do, that this is the best of all possible worlds, he also does not say that the world around us is so squalid that one should never take it as an example. What he rather says is this:

In this particular configuration, our world is not the only one among all the worlds!

Hence he describes the things formed by nature that pass before his eyes, examines them with a penetrating look.

The more deeply he gazes, the easier it is for him to connect today's points of view with those of yesteryear. What imprints itself on him, rather than the finished natural image, is the image of Creation as Genesis, for him the sole essential image.

He then allows himself the thought that the Creation can scarcely have come to stop today, so that he extends the world-creating activity from somewhere back there forward to the here and now, lending Genesis duration.

He goes farther.

He says to himself, restricting himself to this world: Our world once upon a time looked different, and it will look different again.

And, leaning toward the Beyond, he opines: On other stars things may have assumed very different forms.

Such mobility on the paths of natural Creation is a good school of formation for him.

It allows one who creates to move from the ground upward, and, being himself mobile, he will be careful to let freedom prevail in the development of his paths of configuration.

Granted this way of approaching things, one must give him the benefit of the doubt if he declares that the present stage of the world of appearances, the one that happens to meet his eye, is inhibited by mere accident, inhibited temporally and spatially. He takes it to be all-too-limited in contrast to the world of which he has

caught a glimpse that runs deeper, the world he has felt in a more animated way.

And is it not true that even when we take the very small step of looking through a microscope we see images right before our eyes that, if we were not in on the game, if we saw them quite by accident somewhere out there, we would all proclaim to be fantastic and extravagant?

Meanwhile, Mr. X, coming across such an image in his daily tabloid, would cry, "That's supposed to be a form of nature? It's a botched piece of art!"

So, then, is the artist to grapple with a microscope? With history? Paleontology?

Only by way of comparison, only in the direction of mobility. And not in the direction of fidelity to a nature that is under scientific control!

Only in the direction of freedom.

In the sense of a freedom that does not lead to determinate phases of development, which were once exactly like this in nature or will be exactly like this, or might be like this on some other star (which perhaps one day we will be able to demonstrate), but rather in the sense of a freedom that simply demands the right to be as mobile as grand nature itself is mobile.

From modeled image to primordial image!

Presumptuous fellow, this artist, who doubtless remains in hiding all the while. Yet artists are called upon today to press forward, to achieve some sort of proximity to that secret ground by which the primordial law nourishes every development.

There where the central organ of all temporal-spatial animatedness, whether we call it the brain or the heart of Creation, occasions all the functions: who as an artist would not want to dwell there? In the womb of nature, in the primal ground of Creation, which holds the secret key to everything that is?

But not everyone should head there! Each person should move in the domain where the beat of his heart tells him he should move.

Thus in their own age, our antipodes of yesteryear, the impressionists, quite rightly dwelled by the tender shoots and the ground-cover of everyday appearances. Our own pounding heart drives us downward, down deep to the primal ground.

Whatever grows out of this drive, whether it be called, as it well may, dream or idea or fantasy, is for now to be taken quite seriously, at least if it ceaselessly engages itself to configuration by the appropriate pictorial means.

For these curiosities will then become realities, realities of art, realities that make of life something more than, on average, it appears to be.

Because they do not simply mirror what has been seen, adding a dash more or less of temperament, but rather make visible those things that were seen in secret.

"By the appropriate pictorial means," I said. For this is what decides whether images are to be born or something else is to happen. It also decides what kinds of images will result.

Our agitated times have seen a great deal of chaos and confusion, at least if we are not still too close to it all not to be deceived about it.

But our artists, even the most recent ones, appear to be striving

more and more—

To cultivate these pictorial means, to develop them purely and to apply them purely.

When people talk about the infantilism of my sketches, they must be taking as their point of departure those linear constructions in which I was trying to connect an objective representation of, let us say, a human being, with a pure presentation of the linear element.

Had I wanted to render a human being "as he is," then I would have been using for this configuration such a befuddling confusion of lines that one could hardly speak of a pure, elementary presentation; rather, it would have been a muddying to the point of unrecognizability.

Furthermore, I do not really want to render the human being as he is, but rather in the way he might be.

And so a connection between worldview and the pure practice of art may succeed.

And so it stands with the entire region of our involvement with formal means; everywhere, also with colors, all muddying has to be avoided.

That would also apply to the so-called untrue rendering of color in recent art.

As that "infantile" example tells you, I am inclined to present myself by way of partial operations:

I am also a draughtsman.

I tried pure drawing. I tried pure chiaroscuro painting, and with color I tried all the partial operations to which my orientation, guided by the chromatic disc, could give rise. So that I elaborated the types of chromatically committed chiaroscuro painting, painting with complementary colors, painting with bright colors, and painting with all colors.

In each case this was bound up with the rather subconscious pictorial dimensions.

Then I tried all the possible syntheses of any two types. Combining and recombining, but, to be sure, always conserving as much as possible the pure element. Sometimes I dream of a work of enormous scope that would extend through all the regions, the elementary, objective, content-based, and stylistic.

That will certainly remain a dream, but it is good every now and then to imagine to myself such a possibility, even if the possibility of it still seems vague today.

Nothing should be done headlong. It has to grow, has to mature, and if some day the time is ripe for such a work, so much the better!

We still have to go looking for it.

We found parts, but not the whole thing.

We do not yet have the energy that will carry us all the way. For we are not sustained by a people.

We are looking for a people, however. We started looking over there at the state-supported Bauhaus.

We started there with a community to which we have devoted everything we possess.

More we cannot do. ■

Translated by David Farrell Krell

John Sallis

Klee's Philosophical Vision

BORDERING ON PHILOSOPHY

In the spring of 1901, at the age of twenty-one, Klee drew up a program in which he identified philosophy and poetry as his ideal professions. At that time Klee was a student at the Bavaria Royal Academy of Fine Art in Munich and, only a few months earlier, had begun attending the painting class given by Franz Stuck. Not surprisingly, then, the program he drew up also included, as his *real* profession, the plastic arts and, to cope with monetary exigencies, the drawing of illustrations. This program is indicative that, as in general the ideal informs the real, so philosophy and poetry, in various guises, continually inform Klee's artistic work. Yet neither philosophy nor poetry is allowed to subvert the genuine task. A few months after he had drawn up the program, as he was preparing for his trip to Italy with his friend Hermann Haller, Klee wrote in his diary: "Philosophical striving. Optimistic way. The only misgiving was [that I might neglect] the genuine task by delving too deeply into philosophy and poetry."¹

Nonetheless, more than two decades later, in his lecture "On Modern Art," presented on the occasion of an exhibition of his work at the Kunstverein in Jena, Klee declares that the artist "is perhaps, without really wanting to be, a philosopher."² This declaration comes in the wake of Klee's explanation of how it happens that the artist often produces seemingly arbitrary deformations of the natural forms of appearances. His point is that the artist—and here he is defending *modern* art—does not feel bound to these appearances, these "end-forms," for he does not regard them as the essence of the natural process of creation. Rather, the artist places more importance on the formative forces (*an den formenden Kräften*) than on the end-forms. It is thus, by virtue of the shift from the end-forms (the natural appearances) to the formative forces behind them, that the artist is perhaps a philosopher.

This decisive shift regarding what the artwork would present has its correlate on the side of the work itself, namely, in a shift from form to forming or form-giving (*Formung*). In a Bauhaus course in 1924, Klee explains this shift to his students:

Forming determines form and thus is superior to it. Form is never to be considered as something settled, as a result, as an end, but rather as genesis, as becoming, as essence. Form as appearance is an evil, dangerous specter. What is good is form as movement, as action, as active form. What is bad is form as immobility, as an end, as something suffered through and achieved. What is good is forming. What is bad is form. Form is the end, is death. Forming is movement, is action. Forming is life.³

1 Paul Klee, *Tagebücher von Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1957), #137, #175. With the exception of David Farrell Krell's translation of "On Modern Art" (included in this volume), all translations of texts by Klee are my own.

2 Klee, "On Modern Art," 13.

3 Paul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 2: Unendliche Naturgeschichte*, ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1970), 269.

Since art is to present, to make visible, the formative forces, which, from behind appearances drive the movement, the genesis, by which form is imparted to appearances, it is imperative that the artwork embody, not merely the form that appearances assume, but the forming by which the form is installed. This imperative, Klee adds, constitutes "the elemental theory of creativity."⁴

Thus it is incumbent upon the artist to press on beyond appearances to the genesis and forces underlying them. These invisible, underlying elements constitute "the real truth"⁵ that the artist strives to reach and to present. It is a striving that in this respect has an affinity to philosophical striving. This affinity is made especially evident in a statement that occurs repeatedly, with only slight variation, in the Bauhaus courses. Klee speaks of steps "in the direction of the essential...as opposed to the impressional." He continues: "One learns to look behind the façade, to get to the root of things. One learns to recognize what flows beneath, learns the prehistory of the visible. One learns to dig deep, to lay bare. One learns to lay the ground [begründen], learns to analyze."⁶ In the idiom of Klee's Jena lecture, the imperative is that the artist bring a penetrating look to bear on the things that nature sets fully formed before his eyes, that he look ever more deeply into the underlying genesis until his gaze rests in "proximity to that secret ground by which the primordial law nourishes every development." Extending his vision beyond the here and now, the artist would come to dwell "in the womb of nature, in the primal ground of Creation, which holds the secret key to everything that is."⁷

As the philosopher moves from present appearances to their underlying ground, so the artist too would transcend the forms present here and now in the direction of their ground. This philosophical striving on the part of the artist is expressed in the famous contrast that Klee draws between himself and his friend Franz Marc, who possessed a noble sensuousness and warmth as well as the strongest of bonds to the earth:

My fire is more like that of the dead or of the unborn.... I place myself at a remote, original point of creation, where I assume formulas for men, animals, plants, stone and earth, fire, water, and air and, at the same time, for all circling forces.... My earthly eye is too far-sighted and sees mostly through and beyond the most beautiful things.⁸

Klee as artist is similarly placed by the words that were to be engraved on his gravestone: "I cannot be grasped in the here and now [diesseitig], for I dwell just as well with the dead as with the unborn, somewhat closer to creation than usual, but far from

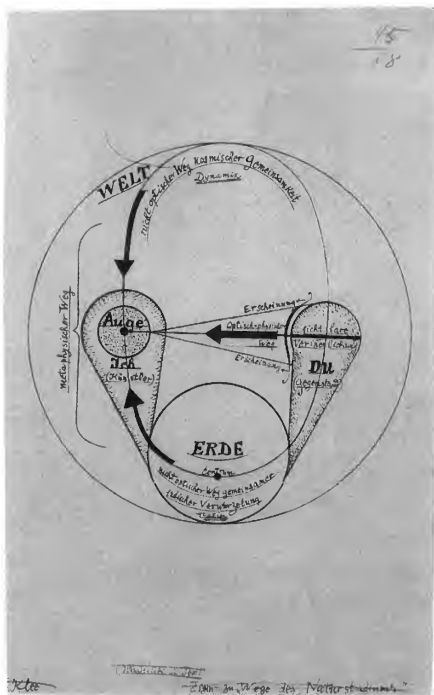


Fig. 1: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *I-You-Earth-World (Ich-Du-Erde-Welt)*, c. 1924, from "Ways of Studying Nature," in Boris Friedewald, *Paul Klee: Life and Work* (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 124.

close enough."⁹

Yet what is the structure and character of artistic transcendence, of the move, effected through the artwork, from present appearances to their ground? Klee describes it, first of all, as based on "the knowledge that the thing is more than its outside reveals."¹⁰ Thus, the move proceeds, in the first instance, from the optical exterior to the objective interior. Klee explains that such a move can be carried out by dissecting the thing and visualizing its inside by way of plane sections; clearly this is the method of cubism in the broad sense applicable to many of Klee's own works.

Yet, in addition to the penetrating intuition that culminates in making visible the interior of the object, there are other ways, non-optical ways, that serve to conjoin beholder and object, that are indeed essential in constituting the appearance of the object, its manifestness in and to our experience. There is, first, the "way

4 Ibid.

5 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #1081.

6 Paul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre I: Das bildnerische Denken*, 3rd ed., ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1971), 69. See also *Unendliche Naturgeschichte*, 35.

7 Klee, "On Modern Art," 14.

8 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #1008.

9 Ibid., 427.

10 Paul Klee, "Wege des Naturstudiums," in *Paul Klee: Kunst-Lehre*, ed. Günther Regel (Leipzig: Reclam, 1987), 68.

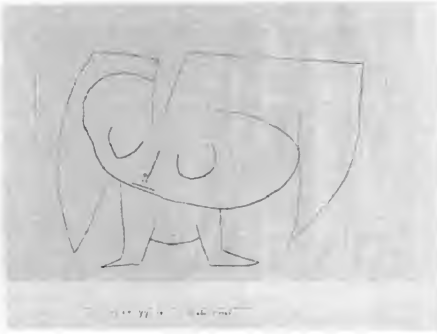


Fig. 2: Paul Klee, *More Bird (mehr Vogel)*, 1939/939. Pencil on paper, 21 x 29.5 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

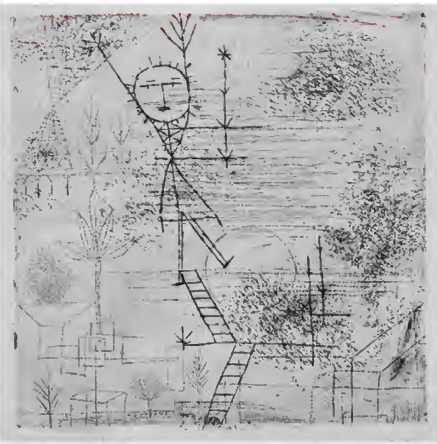


Fig. 3: Paul Klee, *Height! (Höhe!)*, 1928/189. Etching on copper, 23 x 22.8 cm, Private collection, as permanent loan in the Von der Heydt-Museum, Wuppertal.

of common earthly rootedness," which "arises from below"; and, second, there is the "way of cosmic community [*Gemeinschaft*], which descends from above."¹¹ Klee calls these "metaphysical ways"; and in the diagram that accompanies this account, he shows the first way as arising from the earth and the second as descending from the world (see fig. 1). To these two ways there correspond static forms and dynamic forms, respectively. The lower way holds in force the gravitational pull toward the center of the earth; it is the locus of the problem of static equilibrium, which, says Klee, "may be characterized by the words:

"To stand despite all possibility of falling."¹² One of Klee's most exquisite presentations of this way and this problem is found in the work *Tightrope Walker (Seiltänzer)* (1923; plate 20). The upper way evokes our longing to free ourselves from earthly bondage, to gain free mobility, to soar, to fly. Flying is a frequent theme in Klee's artistic work, for instance, in his numerous drawings of birds, such as *More Bird (mehr Vogel)* (1939; fig. 2) and *Superior Bird (höherer Vogel)* (1940; plate 16). In the works *Uneven Flight (unebene Flucht)* (1939; plate 14) and *Collection of Doves (Tauben Sammlung)* (1939; plate 10) both the upward way (as longed for, never simply traversed) and the dissection or deformation of the object are presented. The longing for the upward way is both presented in and named in the title of the ink drawing *Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying (geht kaum mehr, fliegt noch nicht)* (1927; plate 15). In the etching *Height! (Höhe!)* (1928; fig. 3), there is displayed the exhilaration of being on the upward way.

Klee stresses the union of these two metaphysical ways as well as their connection to internalizing vision, though as these examples show, one or another of these moments may predominate in a particular work. Nonetheless, they cohere in a synthesis of visions, and it is from this synthesis that the form of a work arises. The figures thus produced "totally deviate from the optical image of the object" and hence look like distortions of its natural appearance. And yet, Klee continues, "from the standpoint of totality" they "do not contradict it."¹³

These formulations, including the account of the two metaphysical ways as directed from earth and world, occur in the text "Ways of Studying Nature," which first appeared in a 1923 Bauhaus publication. The similarity to the formulations in Martin Heidegger's 1935–36 essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" is striking. To be sure, there are fundamental differences: most notably, for Heidegger world is neither identified with the cosmos nor taken to be essentially related to it, whereas Klee repeatedly stresses that our abode is not just on the earth but also in the cosmos, that there is cosmic—and not just terrestrial—community. Thus, it is highly unlikely, as Pöggeler has shown,¹⁴ that Heidegger was influenced in this regard by Klee, especially since Heidegger's engagement with Klee's work came more than two decades after he wrote "The Origin of the Work of Art." Furthermore, after Heidegger saw the Klee collection in Basel in the late 1950s and was invited to write a preface to a publication about the collection, he declined because, as he wrote, "there is especially the following difficulty: that it is still not clear to what extent Klee's self-interpretation ('cosmic' etc.) properly represents all that occurs in his creative work."¹⁵ Hence, there are not only

¹² *Ibid.*, 69.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 70.

¹⁴ Referring to the thesis, put forth by Siegbert Peetz, that Heidegger's artwork essay was directly influenced by the formulation in Klee's "Ways of Studying Nature," Pöggeler shows how, beyond the most general aspect, the two treatments of earth and world are fundamentally different, so much so as to preclude there having been any direct influence. See Otto Pöggeler, *Bild und Technik: Heidegger, Klee und die moderne Kunst* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002), 121.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.



Fig. 4: Paul Klee, *Death and Fire (Tod und Feuer)*, 1940/332. Oil and colored paste on burlap, 46.7 x 44.6 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

fundamental differences between their respective conceptions of world and earth but also serious reservations on Heidegger's part as to whether Klee's theoretical formulations measure up to the originary character of his artistic work. Nonetheless, even with these limitations, the affinity between their respective analyses suffices to demonstrate that, at the very least, Klee's theoretical writings border on philosophy.

Indeed his writings, not only the theoretical essays but also the *Diaries* and the notes from the Bauhaus courses, are replete with passages that touch upon fundamental philosophical themes. Even before he began his art studies in Munich, Klee was preoccupied with questions about time and about eros, as reflected in a remark from 1901: "The future slumbers within man and needs only to awaken. It cannot become. Hence, even a child knows Eros."¹⁶ In his first theoretical essay, "Creative Credo," written in 1918, he construes the relation between time and space in a way that proves to be decisive for his artistic work and for his interpretation of the work. He writes that "space is a temporal concept." His explanation follows: "When a point becomes movement and line, that requires time. Likewise when a line shifts into surface. It is the same with the movement of surfaces into space."¹⁷ Correspondingly, Klee emphasizes that works of visual art are not simply spatial but equally temporal, that they have a certain temporality that the acute beholder senses and follows in moving between different areas of the work. In other words, there are paths through the work that are to be traversed in a certain temporal rhythm.

At about the same time that he drew up his program designating the ideal and real professions, Klee wrote: "Then I philosophize about death, which makes up for what was not completed in life. The longing for death, not as destruction, but as striving toward perfection."¹⁸ Later there are frequent reflections on death, such as the following from 1932:

Death is nothing bad; this I came to terms with long ago. Do we even know what is more important: life now or what will come after? Perhaps that other life is more important, but that is something we know nothing about. I will die happy if I have created a few more good works.¹⁹

Yet virtually all that Klee wrote about death pales in comparison with the many works touching on death that he created in the face of his own impending death, foremost among them the 1940 painting *Death and Fire (Tod und Feuer)*; fig. 4).

Klee writes also about the place of the human, about how humans are situated, not only in the cosmos, not only in connection with earth and world, but also in relation to animals and gods. A diary entry from December 1903 reads:

There are two mountains on which it is bright and clear, the mountain of the animals and the mountain of the gods. But between them lies the dim valley of men. If one of them happens to gaze upward, he is seized by a premonitory, insatiable longing, he who knows that he does not know, for those that do not know that they do not know and for those who know that they know.²⁰

Whether deliberately or not, the passage echoes the voice of Socrates, both his declaration that his merely human wisdom consists in knowing that he does not know and his portrayal, in the *Symposium*, of the erotic human as ever in between ignorance and wisdom, mortality and immortality. It was in fact at about this time that Klee records in his diary having just read the *Symposium* (though perhaps not for the first time) and comments: "Plato's *Symposium* very beautiful."²¹ Klee also offers his own portrayal of this human being-in-between in the form of the drawing *Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying* (plate 15).

In the Bauhaus courses there are logical analyses of certain concepts and even, in one instance, of the concept of concept, that is, of the essence of concept as such. According to Klee's analysis, what pertains fundamentally to concepts is opposition: "A concept is not thinkable without its opposite.... A concept is not effective without its opposite."²² Klee cites as an example

16 Cited in Boris Friedewald, *Paul Klee: Life and Work* (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 17.

17 Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," in *Kunst-Lehre*, 62.

18 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #143.

19 Cited in Friedewald, *Paul Klee*, 169.

20 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #539.

21 *Ibid.*, #568.

22 Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 15.

the opposed concepts of chaos (disorder) and cosmos (order). Since opposition belongs intrinsically to concepts, there is—Klee concludes—no such thing as a concept in itself (*Begriff an sich*). There are only pairs of concepts, and it is only as paired with its opposite that a concept can function meaningfully—as “above” requires “below,” “left” requires “right,” “behind” requires “in front,” and in general, thesis requires antithesis. Klee offers a graphic supplement to the analysis, connecting the opposites by a line and noting that the line may be longer or shorter, depending on the extent of the opposition between the opposed concepts. Along the line a concept and its opposite can move closer to or farther from each other as the magnitude of the opposition becomes less or greater; only the central point on the line is fixed in the sense that here the opposition is resolved and the concepts rendered dormant. Klee indicates, finally, that this graphic logic of the concept is to be directive for the artist: in artistic production dualities such as good and evil are to be treated, not as mere dyads, but as complementary opposites in their unity; that is, they are to be handled artistically in such a way that they are held together in their very opposition. Through this analysis Klee thus explicates what is required in order, as an early diary entry put it (in the form of a hope), “to be able to reconcile the opposites.”²³

Although highly theoretical analyses abound in Klee’s essays and lecture notes, he repeatedly insists on the limitation of theory and of theoretical discourse with respect to artistic creation. In a Bauhaus course in 1922 he tells his students: “I warned you against calculating, for theory after all only means arranging things that are present in feeling and plays only a secondary role in the creative process, namely the role of criticism, which sets in afterwards.”²⁴ A similarly supplemental relation obtains when the artist engages in theoretical discourse about his art, as Klee indicates at the beginning of his Jena lecture by expressing his concern as to whether he can speak of his work in the right way and by his insistence that his words are not to be taken in isolation but as complementary to his art which “speak[s] for itself in its own language.”²⁵ In a diary entry from 1909, Klee gives a more specific and decisive indication regarding the determination of creative activity. He writes: “Moreover, in order to be successful, it is essential never to work toward an image already envisioned in advance. Rather, one must give oneself completely to the developing portion of the area to be painted.”²⁶ Here Klee makes it clear how decisively his sense of artistic creation differs from the ancient model of *techné*: in artistic creation it is not a matter of having the work in view—in the mind’s eye, as we say—in advance so as then simply to materialize it in the actual artwork, which would thus come to be made precisely in the image of the paradigm envisaged in advance and directive throughout the creative process. It is not a matter of a vision prior to the produc-

tion of the work but rather of a vision that only emerges as the work itself takes shape. Thus, artistic creation is not determined, not governed, by a concept or image of what is to be created. An artwork is not simply a translation: artistic production does not merely translate into material form an idea or an image envisioned independently and in advance of the creative activity that brings the work forth. It is in this connection that Klee writes in a 1918 diary entry: “In art vision is not so essential as making-visible.”²⁷ Artistic creation is not guided by an antecedent vision; the artist does not know in advance what is to be brought forth. In Klee’s own theoretical formulation: “Art plays an *unknowing* play [unwissend Spiel] with ultimate things, and yet it reaches them!”²⁸ It is for this reason, because the truth that comes to be manifest in and through an artwork is not made manifest through conceptual, theoretical activity, that art can offer an attestation that is independent of philosophy. What comes to be thought philosophically can also be disclosed in the medium of art in such a way that philosophy and art become supplementary, each in its own distinctive way opening onto the same truth.

ARTISTIC ATTESTATION

Klee recognized that art and philosophy have, despite their basic difference, a certain affinity. In a diary entry from 1917, he writes: “Philosophy has an inclination [Neigung] toward art; at the beginning I was astonished at what all they saw.”²⁹ Indeed many of the most original philosophers from the 1920s on came to see Klee’s work as presenting in the guise of art certain of the most fundamental issues with which they, as philosophers, were engaged. The list includes a wide range of thinkers: Benjamin, Adorno, Heidegger, Blanchot, Derrida, Foucault, Gadamer, Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, and others. While each of these took up Klee’s work in a distinctive way, perhaps the most remarkable cases are those of Benjamin, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty.

In 1921, on the occasion of visiting an exhibition of paintings by Klee’s friend August Macke, who had been killed in the war in 1914, Benjamin wrote: “I am coming more and more to the realization that I can depend sight unseen, as it were, only on the painting of Klee, Macke, and maybe Kandinsky.”³⁰ Around the same time, Benjamin purchased a small painting by Klee entitled *Angelus Novus* (1920; fig. 5). The work came to figure prominently in Benjamin’s thought. His understanding of what he saw attested in it was finally expressed in his 1940 essay “On the Concept of History.” His meditation on Klee’s angel makes up the entire ninth section of the essay:

There is a picture by Klee named *Angelus Novus*. It shows an angel who looks as though he is about to move away from something at

23 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #389.

24 Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 295. See also *Tagebücher*, #961, where Klee reports that he argued with Marc’s wife—and so had to apologize to Marc—about the theory of art; Klee says that he “protested forcefully against the concept of theory in itself [Theorie an sich].”

25 Klee, “On Modern Art,” 9.

26 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #857.

27 *Ibid.*, #1134.

28 Klee, “Schöpferische Konfession,” 66.

29 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #1081.

30 Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913–1926*, ed. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), 505.



Fig. 5: Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920/32. Oil transfer and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 31.8 x 24.2, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Fania and Gershom Scholem; John Herring, Marlene and Paul Herring; Jo Carole and Ronald Lauder, B87.994.

which he is staring. His eyes are open wide, his mouth is open, and his wings are spread. The angel of history must look like this. He has his face turned toward the past. Where a chain of events appears before us, he sees one single catastrophe, which incessantly piles wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. He would like to stay, to waken the dead, and join together what has been shattered. But a storm is blowing from paradise, which has got caught in his wings and which is so strong that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly drives him into the future, to which he turns his back, while the pile of wreckage before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.³¹

In what Benjamin gleans from Klee's picture, in the discourse that the picture evoked nearly twenty years after he acquired it, Benjamin's thought is perhaps also, as he once said both of Klee and of Kafka, essentially solitary. It is a thought issuing in a vision of history, in a solitary philosophical vision that is reflected back to itself in the visionary look of Klee's angel.

31 Walter Benjamin, "Über den Begriff der Geschichte," in *Illuminationen: Ausgewählte Schriften 1* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977), 255.



Fig. 6: Paul Klee, *Heroic Roses (heroische Rosen)*, 1938/139. Oil on jute fabric, 68 x 52 cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

In the late 1950s, Ernst Beyeler, whom Heidegger often visited in Basel, acquired a large collection of works by Klee, including a number of the most celebrated works. He set up a temporary exhibition in an old house in a Basel suburb, and it was not long before Heidegger came for a visit to the exhibition. Heidegger was left alone with Klee's works for several hours and then, after a brief pause, returned with his friend Heinrich Petzet to continue viewing the works. Petzet reports that Heidegger was deeply affected by several of the works, especially some of those from Klee's last years. He was impressed, for instance, by "the almost painful pathos of *Heroic Roses* [*heroische Rosen*, 1938; fig. 6] losing their glow in the autumn frost."³² Heidegger reportedly said in reference to this painting: "Klee is able to let attunements [*Stimmungen*] be seen in the picture."³³ Heidegger also was especially attentive to a pen-drawing *Hyperculture of Dynamo-radiolarians 1* (*Überkultur von Dynamoradiolaren 1*) (1926; fig. 7). Radiolarians are small sea animals with star-shaped skeletons; whereas *dynamo* refers to the production of electrical energy. So, as the creatures are presented in the picture, they are like living windmills or wind turbines. In such a picture, according to Heidegger, Klee ironizes the technical by bending it back into the natural and representing the result as a hybrid growth.

32 Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1919–1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 148.

33 Pöggeler, *Bild und Technik*, 132.

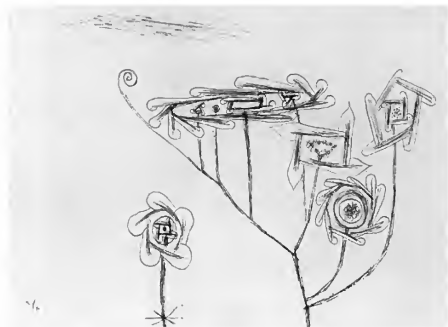


Fig. 7: Paul Klee, *Hyperculture of Dynamo-radiolars 1* (*Überkultur von Dynamoradiolaren 1*), 1926/133. Pen and ink on paper, 23 x 30.8 cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf.

In such works Heidegger saw displayed Klee's confrontation with technology. Not coincidentally, the work comes from Klee's years at the Bauhaus, where the question of the relation of art to technology was a primary concern. Petzet reports also that when Heidegger stood before the work *A Gate* (*ein Tor*; plate 45), painted in 1939, a year before Klee's death, he fell into a deep silence. Then, "after a while he said in a somber tone, 'This is the gate through which we all must at some time pass: death.'"³⁴

Heidegger later visited the Klee exhibition in Basel again and then subsequently paid a visit to the Klee Foundation in Bern. It was in Bern that he saw the two works from Klee's final year to which he refers in the opening of his 1962 lecture "Time and Being":

If now we were to be shown in the original two pictures by Paul Klee that he created in the year of his death, the watercolor *Saint from a Window* [*Heilige aus einem Fenster*; fig 8] and the oil painting on jute *Death and Fire* [*Tod und Feuer*; fig. 4], then we would want to linger for a long time before them and to give up all demands for immediate intelligibility.³⁵

During his visits to Basel and Bern, Heidegger wrote extensive notes about what he saw and about the ways in which Klee's art portended that the future of art—rather than remaining in the orbit of the metaphysics of the past—might prove capable of attesting to the very transformation that Heidegger foresaw as imperative for thought. Though these notes have not yet been published, a good deal is known about their contents.³⁶ In one note Heidegger

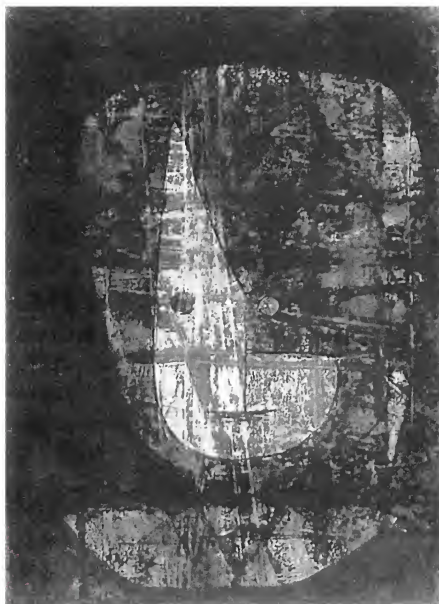


Fig. 8: Paul Klee, *Saint from a Window* (*Heilige aus einem Fenster*), 1940/56. Watercolor and chalk on paper, 29.2 x 20.8 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

writes that "The Origin of the Work of Art" thinks historically the works that have been (*die gewesenen Werke*). He continues: the art to come no longer is tasked with the erecting of world and the setting forth of earth, as thematized in the artwork essay, but with bringing about the relation from out of the event of conjuncture (*das Erbringen des Verhältnisses aus Ereignis der Fuge*). More generally, he writes that Klee is the sign of the coming transformation of art in relation to the transformation of being. In a letter to Petzet after his visits to the Klee exhibition, Heidegger wrote: "In Klee something has happened that none of us grasps as yet."³⁷ It was during this period of preoccupation with Klee's work that Heidegger reportedly spoke about writing a second part to "The Origin of the Work of Art." Though Heidegger seems never to have written such a text, the fact that he saw a need to do so is indicative of the effect that his encounter with Klee's work had on his understanding of art and of its future prospects.

In Merleau-Ponty's essay *Eye and Mind*, it is Klee who figures preeminently as the prototypical modern painter. Both Klee's artistic work and his theoretical writings play an instrumental role in Merleau-Ponty's venture in this essay to develop an ontological conception of painting as such. Both in its original appearance in *Art de France* in 1961 and in the book version published after

34 Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues*, 148.

35 Martin Heidegger, "Zeit und Sein," in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 14 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2007), 5.

36 See Günter Seubald, "Heideggers nachgelassene Klee-Notizen," *Heidegger Studies* 9 (1993): 5–12 and Pöggeler, "Klee im Blickfeld Heideggers," in *Bild und Technik*, 117–58.

37 Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues*, 150.

Merleau-Ponty's death, the text included a number of images, among them a color reproduction of Klee's *Park near Lu[cerne]* (*Park bei Lu[zern]*) (1938).

Early in the essay Merleau-Ponty declares that "painting celebrates no other enigma but that of visibility."³⁸ In celebrating visibility, however, painting celebrates it precisely as enigmatic, that is, as implicated in moments or aspects that ordinary vision regards as invisible. In other words, painting celebrates visibility by giving "visible existence to what profane vision believes to be invisible."³⁹ In short, painting "makes visible" (*trend visible*), as Merleau-Ponty says with obvious reference to Klee's celebrated statement that "art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible."⁴⁰

Yet how does Merleau-Ponty identify this invisible that painting, in its celebration of enigmatic visibility, makes visible? In the Working Notes to his unfinished, posthumously published work *The Visible and the Invisible*, Merleau-Ponty calls it "the invisible of the visible" and explains that this "invisible is not the contradictory of the visible," that "the visible itself has an invisible inner framework," that "the invisible is the secret counterpart of the visible," that "it appears only within it."⁴¹ The text of *The Visible and the Invisible* is still more explicit:

It is therefore not a *de facto* invisible, like an object hidden behind another, and not an absolute invisible, which would have nothing to do with the visible; rather, it is the invisible of this world, that which inhabits this world, sustains it, and renders it visible, its proper and interior possibility, the Being of this being [l'Être de cet l'étant].⁴¹

Thus, the invisible that painting renders visible is what already will have rendered visible the visible itself; it is what will have made the visible visible, what will, even while remaining invisible, have constituted the very visibility of the visible. Extending Merleau-Ponty's allusion to Heidegger, one could say that the invisible is what grants to visible things their truth, their possibility of coming forth into unconcealment.

Yet Merleau-Ponty's declaration near the outset of *Eye and Mind* that painting celebrates the enigma of visibility does not yet venture quite so far into the ontology of the visible. Rather, it moves at a more properly phenomenological level where it is a matter of the virtually unseen that informs—and so renders visible—the things seen in ordinary vision. Merleau-Ponty mentions light, lighting, shadows, reflections, color—that is, all those moments that are open to vision without being visible things, all that haunts these things like ghosts. For the most part, we do not see as such the configuration of lighting, of light and shadow, that not only enframes appearing things but also guides vision

as it retraces the very lines that such configurations have already installed. These specters that haunt the scene of the visible "exist only at the threshold of profane vision."⁴² It is the genius of the painter not only to be able to see them as such but also, in a distinctively painterly way, to interrogate them concerning their capacity to render things visible, to expose just how it is that they grant to things a proper visibility. One result is a certain reversibility of roles between the painter and the visible, so that, as many painters have said—and Merleau-Ponty mentions specifically Klee—it is as though things look at the painter.

Another pertinent passage in *Eye and Mind* concerns line. Merleau-Ponty begins with what he calls the prosaic conception of the line. According to this conception the line belongs to things; it is a property or attribute of objects themselves, the outer contour of the apple, for instance, or the border between the plowed field and the meadow. The task of the artist would be, then, simply to take over the line present in the world, to reproduce it on the surface of the work. And yet, it is precisely this conception of the line that painting puts in question, indeed suspends. Merleau-Ponty says: "This line is contested by all modern painting, probably by all painting."⁴³ Why is it contested? Because painters—above all, modern painters such as Klee and Matisse—recognize "that there are no lines visible in themselves [il n'y a pas de lignes visibles en soi], that neither the contour of the apple nor the border between the field and the meadow is here or there, that they are always on the near or far side of the point where one looks."⁴⁴ In other words, one sees the line and yet does not see it. One sees the contour of the apple and yet sees nothing other than the apple contoured against the background. One sees the border between the field and the meadow, and yet whatever one sees is either field or meadow, not the border itself, not the border as something in itself. Lines are, in Merleau-Ponty's words "indicated, implicated, and even very imperatively required by the things, but they are not themselves things."⁴⁵ Seen yet not seen, there yet not there, present yet not present, the line is ambivalent. Even in its purely mathematical form, the line is enigmatic: it can outline and thus determine a geometric shape, and yet, since it has no breadth, since it has only the one dimension of length, it is, in the strictest sense, invisible. In outlining the things of the perceptual world, the line is similarly ambivalent; its character, its very mode of visibility, of presence, wavers indecisively between opposites, and yet it is decisive, indeed imperative, for the appearing of things. The line belongs to the visible spectacle, is engaged in the very granting of its visibility, yet is not itself a part of the spectacle.

Clearly, then, contesting the line, as painting does, does not entail its exclusion. Rather, as Merleau-Ponty says, "it is a matter of freeing the line, of reviving its constituting power." It is at this point, in reference to this freeing of the line, that Merleau-Ponty cites that most telling phrase from Klee. Here is the citation: "For henceforth, as Klee says, the line no longer imitates the

38 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'œil et l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 26.

39 *Ibid.*, 27.

40 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 269, 274.

41 *Ibid.*, 198.

42 Merleau-Ponty, *L'œil et l'esprit*, 29.

43 *Ibid.*, 72.

44 *Ibid.*, 73.

45 *Ibid.*

visible; it 'makes visible'; it is the diagram [*l'épure*] of a genesis of things.⁴⁶ Thus, painting—especially modern painting—frees the line from the imitation function, from the mimetic operation based on the prosaic conception of the line. At the same time, painting frees the line for the constituting operation to which it is suited.

The conclusion is evident, though in the essay Merleau-Ponty leaves it somewhat implicit: because the line displays the same ambivalent character as do all moments of the invisible, it is especially suited to render these moments visible on the surface of the work, be it a drawing or a painting and whatever materials are used in its composition. Because, no matter how it is inscribed, the line renders visible the invisible of the visible, it offers a diagram of the genesis of things; it renders visible on the surface of the work the way in which things come forth into their visibility, their unconcealment; it renders visible the moments by which the total visibility of visible things comes to be constituted.

A final passage in *Eye and Mind* takes up again the theme of visibility and gestures toward the analyses in *The Visible and the Invisible*, on which Merleau-Ponty was working at the time he wrote *Eye and Mind*. Now Merleau-Ponty formulates with remarkable precision the primary ontological theme: "What is proper to the visible [*le propre du visible*] is to have a layer of an invisible in the strict sense, which it renders present as a certain absence."⁴⁷ It is this occult, secluded layer of invisibility that painting renders visible, that—in the words of Klee that Merleau-Ponty pieces together—painting annexes to the visible. It is because of painting's engagement with this invisibility, which, while of the visible, also lies outside the realm of visible things, that Merleau-Ponty is led finally to what he calls the ontological formula of painting. The formula consists of words, written by Klee in 1916, which were inscribed on his tomb. They bespeak painting's engagement beyond the here and now of visible things. Merleau-Ponty cites them in French translation: "Je suis insaisissable dans l'immanence." In Klee's German the formula reads: "Diesseitig bin ich gar nicht fassbar." In English: "I cannot be at all grasped in the here and now." ■

46 Ibid., 74.

47 Ibid., 85.

Alejandro Arturo Vallega

Paul Klee's Vision of an Originary Cosmological Painting

Paul Klee often has been recognized as one of the painters closest to philosophy in the twentieth century. This has been the case because of his extensive, systematic, and clear writings on painting; his knowledge of philosophy; and for his ability as a musician, that is, his proximity to the rational and the mathematical through his sense of music and harmony.¹ However, I see a deeper reason for the association of the artist and the philosopher in his work, namely, what I would call Klee's attentiveness to the cosmological, rather than the purely formal or mimetic character of painting. Klee's uniqueness lies in his attentiveness to the originary or genetic experience in nature and art, and in offering a new way of understanding—of seeing—paintings and works of art. If one follows Klee's understanding of painting and the work of art, one learns to see the work as a dynamic originary event involving a time-space movement invisible to the eye that seeks only images of objective nature. Moreover, as such an originary event, painting enacts and exposes us to the energy and force behind the arising to presence of nature and life, behind the objective presence of things, plants, animals, and human beings. Painting is for Klee the enactment of energy and force underneath all existence. In order to engage Klee's vision I will mainly focus on his 1924 lecture "On Modern Art," which he gave in Jena on the occasion of an exhibition of his works, and at the same time articulates much of the experiences he had while teaching at the Bauhaus. Following Klee's own strategy, I will first focus on his discussion of the artist and the formal issues involved in painting, rather than on the content.² This will provide the basis for turning to Klee's reinterpretation of the work of art as an originary event that exposes us to the genesis or movement of nature and humanity. I will also discuss briefly some of his course lecture notes from late 1923 and early 1924.³ Following Klee's own aim in his 1924 lecture, the following pages seek to introduce a way of seeing, of looking at painting, that may allow for this dynamic originary movement in the work to be experienced.

1.

Nothing prepares one to write on the unprecedented, and for Paul Klee a work of art is always such an experience. The difference that refers us to the unprecedented character of the work is repeated several times by Klee himself in his famous lecture from 1924, "On Modern Art."⁴ As Klee points out in the introduction of his lecture, engaging his painting through language one can at best hope for a supplement, an approximation that will depend *tout court* on encountering the work itself.⁵ Indeed, painting is its own

1 Herbert Read, introduction to *On Modern Art* by Paul Klee, trans. Paul Findlay (London: Faber and Faber, 1948), ii. Unless this introduction is cited, the quotations from "On Modern Art" are from the translation contained in this volume.

2 Klee, "On Modern Art," 9.

3 Paul Klee, *Notebooks, Volume 2: The Nature of Nature*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Heinz Norden (London: Lund Humphries, 1973).

4 Read, introduction to *On Modern Art*, ii.

5 Klee points out his discussion "meant merely to complement the impressions you yourselves will gain of my images" (Klee, "On Modern Art," 9).

language.⁵ One finds here a definitive difference between painting and language as a linguistic expression and logical tool, as well as between it and the thought that feeds on this sense of language. For Klee, painting is another kind of expression, a distinct way of thought with its language. The sense of painting as a language and way of thought is clearly indicated by the very title of the first volume of his notebooks: *Das bildnerische Denken*, literally “thought in pictures” (translated in the title of the English version as “The Thinking Eye”).⁷ Klee’s aim is mostly to shed some light “on the creative process,” that is, about “the period in which a work receives its shape this process goes on more or less pre-consciously [im Unterbewußten].”⁸ Moreover, the difference in languages only points to a second distinction. For Klee, paintings and works of art are not copies or reproductions of nature. The work of art has its own life. Indeed, the work of art is an event, an originary, dynamic event, that must be engaged as a kind of originary energy (literally a being at work), prior to any reference to things, nature, names, and ideas based on the factual presence of things. Lastly, the work of art seems to “falsify” and “deform” nature in its appearances as it exposes nature in its originary energy, in its movement, extensions, expansions, implosions and explosions.⁹ In following Klee’s differentiations one finds oneself speaking in between distinct fields of experience: language, painting, nature, and life in terms of its originary energy. But it is this last sense that distinguishes the work of art, namely, in that the work of art exposes the originary energy underneath, the undercurrent that gives rise to life. The work of art exposes us to a dynamic event much like the genesis of life—that is, if one learns how to engage the work of art in its originary being at work. As Klee himself would have it in his introduction to his lecture, we may hope at best for an insight, an insight given by our learning to see in an originary manner.

2.

As Herbert Read has pointed out, one of Klee’s main concerns with modern art is the separation between artist and audience or layman.¹⁰ In order to begin to bridge the difference and explain the work of art and the work of the artist, Klee uses a common simile, likening the artist to a tree.¹¹ The roots are the spreading of sensuous information that is received and ordered by the artist, as he/she recognizes order in nature and life. From this spreading rootedness in life the artist receives a fecund flow of impressions that through and in him/her constitute the sap that feeds the creative work. The artist withstands this flow and from it molds vision into work of art. Standing as a trunk the artist sees the works spread beyond him/her, much like the crown of a tree with its branches and foliage.¹² Out of the fingertips of the artist

arise line, shade, and color, to populate the world in their distinct way. In full view of the world, the works unfold and spread in time and space.¹³

The seeming continuity between nature and the work of art breaks when Klee goes on immediately after to make clear that just as roots and crown are not mirror images in a tree, the order of life and nature is not the same as the order of the work that appears.¹⁴ Unlike the traditional understanding of painting, for Klee the work does not accompany reality by mimetic reproduction. Art departs from nature, and this because that is what the artist’s art demands.¹⁵ The artist’s line interrupts, erupts into nature, to disturb it in its static appearance: indeed, art does appear as a deformation of natural forms.¹⁶ But this is a vital divergence that is the result of a difference between two expressions of originary-related forces.¹⁷ Divergence may lead to a misunderstanding concerning the artist’s skill: an artist who does not copy nature may be seen as incompetent or as one who falsifies natural form.¹⁸ And yet, the artist remains like the trunk, true to a vision of order in nature and life, and in answering to that experience, in gathering and transmitting that order, he/she transmits truth, and remains a channel of life.¹⁹ The artist is a channel of life-giving force. Again we find ourselves situated at the center of a tension between nature and art, but introduced now to a sense of energy or force behind life that, although distinct from life and nature in their objective presence, is transmitted by the work and the artist.

3.

The simile is followed by a series of warnings concerning the very possibility of discussing the work of art in its distinct transmission of life and nature. The critical issue is that of the difference between language and the work of art. Language operates as a consecutive method of exposition, that is, when we speak we present one aspect of what is being discussed at a time, one after another.²⁰ Three-dimensional objects appear at the same time as lines, shades, color, mass, depth, and the various relationships between them. When one speaks of a painting one must speak of each dimension or element at a time, but when one looks at a work the dimensions operate upon the senses all at once. In other words, the expression of simultaneous dimensions that occurs in a painting cannot happen in language. The difficulty grows when one intends to consider the distinct dimensions of the work of art separately and then as they mix to configure a composition and style.²¹ As one puts emphasis on one dimension, the other seems to disappear, yet only to reappear again at a later moment in a seemingly irrational or disordered way. In pointing out this ten-

6 Ibid.

7 Paul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 1: Das bildnerische Denken*, 6th ed., ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 2007).

8 Klee, “On Modern Art,” 9.

9 Ibid., 10, 13.

10 Read, introduction to *On Modern Art*, iii.

11 Klee, “On Modern Art,” 10.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 “die deformatorische Notwendigkeit,” *ibid.*, 10; cf. *ibid.*, 13.

17 *Ibid.*, 10.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*

21 *Ibid.*

sion between language and the work of art, Klee has introduced a characteristic that distinguishes painting and other visual works of art, namely the possibility of experiencing simultaneously various dimensions of life, history, and, as we will see later, time in its cosmological sense.

In *Printed Sheet with Pictures (Bilderbogen)* (1937; plate 36), one finds not a story, a moment, a subject, but rather a palimpsest of stories, which all at once strike us to give configuration to a picture, a single blow, or experience that reaches one at the level of heart and mind. Keeping this simultaneity in mind, one finds the figure of *Suicide on the Bridge (Selbstmörder auf der Brücke)* (1913; plate 21) standing upon the top of many elements that simultaneously constitute the distance between the bridge and the bottom of the picture, the distance between life and death.

Before moving on I must add that Klee's observations also repeat what he states from the outset: painting, drawing, and works of art have their own language. This language is not linguistic, and the origin and sense of the work cannot be that objective reality that is fitting to *word* and *concept* as oriented by rational-linguistic understanding alone. There is language, but a language and sense as difficult and savage as that suggested by the mysterious and unsettling experience of *Concert on the Branch (Konzert auf dem Zweig)* (1921; plate 40).

4.

In order to arrive at the heart of Klee's discussion, the question of the content of the work of art, we must follow his path through the discussion of formal issues that will introduce further dimensions of his work and thought.²² Klee makes his strategy clear from the outset. He begins from what is less familiar to the layman, namely form, although his ultimate aim will be the reinterpretation of content in light of what may be learned about the work of art by looking at its various simultaneous dimensions.²³

The most basic dimension in painting concerns its three formal elements: line, tone value or *chiaroscuro*, and color.²⁴ These are analogous to and work in a way that may be expressed in terms of nature, that is, in terms of measurement, weight (tonal contrast, light to dark), and quality (of pigment, each color has a distinct quality).²⁵ In turn these elements have specific ways of relating to each other. Color is a matter of quality (red, yellow), of weight/tone (lighter or darker), and of extension and contraction. Shade or tone also concerns extension. Line only concerns extension. From this analysis we see the possible interaction of the various elements and the variety of possible intermixture between them.²⁶ The analysis gives inklings of the specificity and control Klee has as he paints: he adds an observation that only complicates the system. Vagueness in one's work, applying a color or line in a manner that does not respond to the analytical order of relationship between dimensions is only permissible "when a special

inner need calls for it."²⁷ One may think here for example of a colored line, or the use of grays instead of defined shades of white and black. At the same time, this kind of vagueness remains a matter of conscious execution. Each of these elements responds to a specific quantity, line is length, shade concerns degrees, and color the system of relationships one finds in the color wheel. These are the dimensions of painting's formal elements, before one has come to the configuration of a subject or content.

5.

Klee now introduces a new dimension, the first moment of critical decisiveness, the configuration of the subject, that is the arising of something like the figure or the object.²⁸ As Klee indicates, the arising of the subject of a painting may be likened to the idea of motif and theme in musical thought, particularly in the sense of playfulness between formal elements and form.²⁹ At this point the recognized dimensions are brought together to form content beyond formal considerations. In spite of the extensive analysis of the formal elements, their mixture depends on the mood or disposition of the one creating (*Disposition des Schaffenden*).³⁰ In other words, unlike Leonardo, who gives extensive formulas for the mixing of elements, Klee does not have measurements for the mixing of single elements or for their combination. In the movement of the line beyond the artist's fingertips, out of the mixing of elements, ideas and suggestions arise that may lead to a material interpretation, to the idea of a possible subject for the picture. While the layman only sees the idea he/she holds or the object, the artist has a sense of the interplay of elemental dimensions. Thus the artist is always seeing the formal; but once the object suggests itself, the formal becomes elemental in response and attentiveness to the object. When the idea or suggestion occurs in the artist's vision, he/she is free to follow it, develop it, and to use the formal elements to give it distinct form. Here the requirement for the painter is twofold.³¹ Once the possible subject is identified, that is fittingly "interpreted and named," it has a life separate from the will of the artist.³² But this separate life still remains inseparable from the elements and their originary movement. On the one hand, the title appears; not from nature or an idea, but out of the play of elements, and out of a subconscious play.³³ With title or label the suggested subject becomes a referent for the painter. At the same time the formal issues remain crucial to the execution of the idea or subject. Here, although not specified by Klee, one may think of what painters like Robert Matherwell often pointed out about a successful picture, that the subject or content is always related to the formal elements, as well as to the

27 Ibid.

28 Ibid., 12.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 "bedeutet und genant," *ibid.*, cf. "wenn sie sich unter einem sehr zutreffenden Namen vorstellen," *ibid.*

33 *Ibid.*, 11. The question of the subconscious should not be separated from the question of the disposition of the artist which informs the mixing and manipulation of formal elements (*ibid.*, 14).

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 *Ibid.*, 11.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

kind of surface and physicality of the materials. Unlike the layman's one-sided idea about the work as representation, the artist plays in between the idea and his/her response to elements and materials, with their specific possibilities and character. Indeed, this is why every painter ends up creating a technique and ways of using the basic elements unlike any other. To return to Klee's observation about the activity of the artist, the artist must channel the subject as well as the requirements of the material. This is, needless to say, evident throughout the corpus of Klee's works in his choice of ground, material, content, and title. I must emphasize that Klee does not only paint on primed canvas but very often on such distinct grounds as paper, cardboard, lacquered canvas, plaster-primed burlap, chalk and glue-primed newspaper, chalk-lined gauze, double-layered burlap, and burlap primed with chalk and glue and mounted on cardboard. Each of these grounds is part of a language appropriate to the final subject of the work.

A crucial distinction concerning the relation between nature and painting (the work of art) in Klee becomes clear for us now: the work of art does not so much put into question the existence of objects or nature, but rather, concerns the distinct appearance of objects or life at a given moment in their nature.³⁴ In making clear the formal elements of painting and the coming together of the image in light of their play, we have found that the painter gives form to a distinct configuration at a particular time and in terms of the nature of the content or subject of the work. The combination of elements, in their specific dimensions, leads to formal combinations, which give rise to subjects such as stars, vases, animals, plants, or human beings. Although in his lecture up to this point Klee emphasizes formal elements, we now come to the central issue for him, the content of the work of art.

6.

The dimensions just discussed lead us to the point where the figure or object of the work appears through the constructive combination of the various elements.³⁵ At this point a further dimension appears, "one that has everything to do with the question of content."³⁶ We are speaking of the expressive character of each of the formal elements alone and in their combination.³⁷ A jagged line, a sinking horizontal line, a vertical line, a high contrast of tones, a play of grays upon yellow, the intensity of a pure red or blue, a fading patch of green on red, the crashing of colors diametrically opposed; these are in each case expressions of feeling, which make possible meaning in a work.³⁸ From such an expressive dimension and its repetition appear styles (another dimension of the work).³⁹ Klee emphasizes the contrast between the classical or static style and the extreme "crass and bathetic" style of romanticism with its dynamic play and mixtures, in its

attempt to fly away from the earthly.⁴⁰ Together, these periods point directly to the static quality and dynamics of the mechanism of creative art. In pointing to the dynamism of romanticism, Klee's suggestion is to go further in the direction of the dynamic, following these forces that attempt to fly away from the earthly, to the point of moving on to "the grand circulation" or the great cycle of life.⁴¹

Z.

In order to gain a general understanding of the way this "life-force" occurs in the work of art, I will turn briefly to Klee's remarks on nature and the line in his 1923–24 course at the Bauhaus.⁴² I should emphasize that this is not a course for painters or visual artists, but for designers who are to learn about design, form, and composition. These remarks are crucial for understanding the experience from which Klee writes his 1924 lecture, and for thereby gaining insight into the understanding of the work of art as engaging life-force itself.

For Klee, behind all life as change and development lies movement. He begins his lecture with the most basic observation: "Movement in the terrestrial realm requires force. Analogously with stroke, line and our other pictorial elements like plane or tone and color, etc." (*Bewegung im irdischen Bereich erfordert Energie. Linie und Fläche und ihre gliedernden Energien.*)⁴³ Indeed it will be in light of his discussion of movement (*Bewegung*) and energy (*Energie*) that he will thereafter introduce and explain the basic elements of composition in painting. In his lecture from October 23, 1923, line and plane are discussed in light of the development of plants, their growth, or "progressive motion."⁴⁴ He identifies this progression as a "primitive energy of form creation" (*primäre Energie der Formgestaltung*).⁴⁵ Lines are sheer energy. But, as he points out, this force energy leads not to mere lines; the ultimate result is life: violets, fruit, leaves, and trees. The source of this movement he equates with the seed, which in his analysis becomes "a point" that "is about to emerge from a state in which its mobility was concealed."⁴⁶ This is a point that is about to become linear, which he calls an "irritated point" (*Der gereizte Punkt*).⁴⁷ One finds this point of irritation at each place in the trunk where new branches begin to spring, at each point on the branch where new leaves or flowers begin to appear.

To return to the simile of the tree, it is as if line arose from the fingertips of the artist only to rise into the world, setting its path from out of its force for growth and development. One sees this progress of the line in *Little Tree* (*Bäumchen*) (1935; plate 9) that beautifully evokes Klee's simile. The development is also clear in

40 Ibid.

41 Ibid.

42 Refer to Klee's *The Nature of Nature* in its entirety for these notes.

43 In terms of Klee's thought, one may also speak analogously of energy as force, since energy is understood as the driving urge underneath the arising and growth of life (Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 3).

44 Ibid., 11.

45 Ibid., 25.

46 Ibid., 29.

47 Ibid., 255.

34 Ibid., 13.

35 Ibid.

36 Ibid., 12.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 11.

39 Ibid., 13.

Last Word in the Drama (letztes Wort im Drama) (1938; plate 44) and *Stick It Out!* (durchhalten!) (1940; plate 43). In both cases the line gives rise to the subject. Line for Klee has the intention, the direction, and energy of nature.

The seed first moves earthward in a line, and then heavenward, in the opposite direction, still in a line. Thus, Klee concludes that the spirit of the form creation that occurs in the development of the seed, pictorially speaking, is "linear."⁴⁸ The lines will continue to develop as the plant grows, seeks nutrients, and encounters resistance. This double movement constitutes a typical tension of opposites that operates throughout Klee's understanding of the various elements of painting, and may be clearly seen in the trees and vegetation in *Wall Plant* (Mauerpflanze) (1922; plate 2) where the central image is rooted in a movement of the line toward the ground, while the other figures move upward. Klee finds the movement of the growth of a snail's shell exemplary. The shell shows a movement that arises from a tension between internal sheltering and external progression (the shell protects the internal element and growth at the same time). Indeed, the arrows in Klee's work indicate precisely the movement of line.⁴⁹ One sees this as well in the movement of expansion and self-sheltering or contraction in *Geometric Spiral* (geometrische Spirale) (1927; plate 27). Moreover, as is the case in *Accusation in the Street* (Anklage auf der Strasse) (1933; plate 47), *Manhunt* (Menschenjagd) (1933; plate 49), and *Barbarian Mercenary* (Barbaren-Söldner) (1933; plate 51) the line sustains the movement that leads to the center of the action, the point of energy or irritation.

Through repetition the line will become mass, and the linear forces, as they radiate upward, become a stream of life-force (as in *Little Tree* [plate 9] for example).⁵⁰ Clearly the lesson's aim is to show that each line has a definite purpose in the whole, and that at the same time, each line has a life of its own. (This difference in the function or character of line is clear in the different function of the black lines around the round figures and as they appear alone in *Äliup* [äliup] [1931; plate 7].) But the way he develops this traditional idea is by beginning from a point that has a concealed movement, an "irritated point" (der gereizte Punkt).⁵¹ Moreover, this movement is not conceived in terms of the creation of an already projected idea or object of representation (a tree, a person) but it arises from a distinct point, which will become a whole and its parts (in *Little Tree* one moves from the single line at the bottom, to the tree and then its further branches—the living form).⁵² The lesson begins from nature, and in light of the force of life in nature it introduces basic elements and issues of composition, namely, the characteristics of the point, the origin of movement (irritated point), the progressive motion of the line as a natural phenomenon, and the way each line must attend to the whole. Ultimately the force of life will be expressed by each of the pictorial elements: "Movement in the terrestrial realm requires

force. Analogously with stroke, line and our other pictorial elements like plane or tone and color, etc."⁵³

8.

Returning from a Christmas break on January 9, 1924, Klee sums up the course that begins with the discussion we have just mentioned:

We wound up with the irritated point [der gereizte Punkt] in nature...the seed itself. With this seeming start, we reached the limit of our action. The irritated point, our stylus poised to embark on a line—here is a minimal action.

But emotionally and intellectually...the term "irritated" already sets the scene for an active start.... The instinctive realization that we can continue beyond the start finds confirmation in the concept of infinity, which reaches from the beginning to the end, and is not limited to the beginning alone, and which leads to the concept of circulation. In a circulatory process movement is of the very essence, and the question of the start thus becomes irrelevant.⁵⁴

Having highlighted movement, freed from a chronological ordering, and objective presence, as the condition for both nature and the point and the setting out of the artist, Klee goes on to point out the conclusion to which his analysis has led thus far.

Allowing a primitive and concise output to unfold in this fashion, we took the opportunity to have a closer look at two things: on the one hand the phenomenon of form-giving, in its context with the basic urge, in the sense of a way of life developing from a mysterious motivation towards purposive action.

This phenomenon of form was discernible even in our initial practical work, when form (structure) began to take care of itself on the smallest scale....

The way to form, to be dictated by some inner or outer necessity is more important than the goal itself....

The approach is what counts, determining the character of the work.... Form is given by the process of giving form, which is more important than form itself...what is good is form as

48 Ibid., 29.

49 Ibid., 289–91.

50 Ibid., 34–35.

51 Ibid., 29, 34–35.

52 Ibid., 39.

53 Ibid., 3.

54 Ibid., 255.

movement, as action, as active form.... What is good is form-giving [Formung]. What is bad is form. Form is the end, death. Form-giving is movement, action. Form-giving is life.

These sentences constitute the gist of the theory of creativity. We have now got to the heart of it. Its significance is absolutely basic; and I do not think I can repeat the sentences above often enough.⁵⁵

These words and the course up to this point will serve as an introduction to the rest of the course, that is, to the study of the basic elements of painting: line, tone, and color.⁵⁶ It will be on the basis of this theory of creativity as originary movement that Klee will introduce even the most basic pictorial elements.

As Klee indicates, the central issue behind composition, even at the most elemental level, is form-giving (Formung), that is, analogously, the life-giving movement, the movement of life. More specifically one must remain with the movement, with the unfolding of line, tone, color, and their relationships. Only in remaining with the event of the work in such dynamic sense does form occur out of the form-giving in which the creative urge of the artist and the energy of nature find analogous expression. This form-giving, then, refers to movement, understood as the progression and tension in which life arises to its objective configurations. Lines grow as does life. But this is not only an observation about line movement: tones and colors expand and contract, vibrate, leap. It is this movement, this life-giving energy, that remains the guiding thread for the artist.⁵⁷ At the same time, Klee also makes clear that composition only occurs as a balance between the image as essence (in the play of its elements) and appearance (the objective or material aspect). "The end is but part of the essence (its appearance). The true essential figure is a synthesis of form-giving and appearance."⁵⁸

But the picture is always situated by the life-giving movement that directs and gives sense to the painting. In other words, looking at a painting or work of art in light of Klee's understanding, one would seek the movement of the elements in the painting as well as the movement or life-force that becomes apparent in the subject. In looking at a work of art one is looking for that living movement, that energy, and not for a reproduction or an imitation of life. Indeed, as Klee himself points out on the basis of his own experience in the 1924 lecture, "On Modern Art," imitating life as it appears would only confuse the movement in which painter and nature touch through their creative movement.⁵⁹ In this sense, one may say that Klee's painting is ultimately about the articulation of the energy of life in its movement.

The engagement of movement, energy, and the originary points of tension in Klee's work are readily apparent in his works. In *Violence (Gewalt)* (1933; plate 46), it is clear that line directs the eye to the point of energy, and it is also used to create the density at the point of contact. In *Barbarian Mercenary* (plate 51) the movement of the line leads to the heart of the matter, the point of impact. Line in its movement and creation of dynamic movement is clearly at work in *Flight (Flucht)* (1940; plate 25). In this case, lines move in various directions away from the center while a horizontal movement is sustained. In the comical *Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying (geht kaum mehr, fliegt noch nicht)* (1927; plate 15), the vertigo from the figure's movement comes from the way the lines around the figure continue to displace the center of gravity, as the lines that form the figure's contour continue to move the eye in the direction the figure is walking. The function of line will change throughout Klee's career, as the examples just mentioned indicate. By the later period, line takes flight as a free element. Such freedom of line is visible in *Printed Sheet with Pictures* (plate 36).

9.

To return to the 1924 lecture "On Modern Art," the formal elements and dimensions we discussed are ultimately a complex simultaneous event, which, rather than being a mere construction, form a "composition."⁶⁰ We are speaking of a composition because of the dynamic character of the work in its simultaneous dimensions. But at this point in the lecture Klee still has another dimension in mind. At issue now is the object or content of the work, particularly in its very occurrence as distinct from nature. We have come full circle, and now, having learned the dynamic character of the work, return to the question of the content of the work, but this time to see the work in light of its originary and dynamic character. In other words, Klee will now explain the meaning of painting and the work of art that at first seemed to be a "deformation" of nature. He will reinterpret the work of art in terms of the channeling of life-giving energy in the work as such, in the form-giving (Formung) that is the event of the work.

As Klee explains, the artist's work seems a "deformation" of nature, first of all, because the artist "does not see in these culminating forms the essence of the creative process of nature. More important to him than the culminating forms are the formative forces."⁶¹ As we heard above, the issue of the work of art is the form-giving and not the natural objective form or product. It is at this point, in pointing to this turning from the objects of nature to the form-giving, that Klee will equate the artist's activity with that of the philosopher: "He is perhaps, without really wanting to be, a philosopher."⁶² What brings together philosopher and artist is a gazing beyond the immediate into the very originary event of life and nature. It is creation itself, the genesis, and not the finished product that will occupy the artist. But here the artist

⁵⁵ Ibid., 263, 269.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 237.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 144.

⁵⁸ "Das Ende ist nur ein Teil des Wesens [die Erscheinung]. Wahre wesentliche Gestalt ist eine Synthese von Gestaltung und Erscheinung" [ibid., 117].

⁵⁹ Klee speaks of ending up with a "befuddling confusion of lines" (Klee, "On Modern Art," 14).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

and the philosopher also part. The view of genesis in the artist is not rational but rather unintentional; it is not an explanation of existence that the artist accomplishes, but rather the subconscious engagement with the life-giving movement of existence. This engagement occurs through the form-giving in and as which the artwork occurs: nature's life-giving force is channeled by the artist's activity or movement in form-giving. This is precisely what Klee means when he says that "Nature is creative and so are we."⁶³ In order to begin to understand this sense of creation or genesis in the work, one cannot consider nature in its objective presence or ideas drawn from nature as the basis for art. The creative in nature is movement, and more specifically temporality in its very occurrence; the way life and nature occur as temporal events. But here temporality concerns cosmological time, and not the time of objectively present natural phenomena or historical fact.

10.

As Klee points out in his 1924 lecture, "The more deeply [the artist]...gazes, the easier it is for him to connect today's points of view with those of yesteryear. What imprints itself on him, rather than the finished natural image, is the image of Creation as Genesis, for him the sole essential image."⁶⁴ Given this engagement with temporality, the world appears "all-too-limited in contrast to the world of which he has caught a glimpse that runs deeper, the world he has felt in a more animated way."⁶⁵ In order to further understand this sense of vision we may refer Klee's observations in his 1924 lectures for a moment to the quote from his course in early 1924 concerning the point of irritation and the urge of the artist that we cited in section eight.

As we found in the previous section, the point is not a fixed mark. A point is a concealed occurrence of a movement. This is because the point marks past and future; in occurring in this way, the point marks a cyclical movement. Thus the point, when considered in its movement, may serve as the instigation or experience that situates the observer and the artist's feeling and consciousness in a cosmological time-space cycle: a continuous time of creation without end or beginning. It is this cosmological space-time that the artist engages, and that the work articulates: "There where the central organ of all temporal-spatial animatedness, whether we call it the brain or the heart of Creation, occasions all the functions: who as an artist would not want to dwell there? In the womb of nature, in the primal ground of Creation, which holds the secret key to everything that is?"⁶⁶ These last words may certainly sound like hyperbole if one does not consider them in light of the concrete sense of movement that Klee finds in the elements of painting.

63 "Die Natur ist schöpferisch und wir sind es" (Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 259).

64 Klee, "On Modern Art," 13.

65 *Ibid.*, 14.

66 "Da, wo das Zentralorgan aller zeitlich-räumlichen Bewegtheit, heiße es nun Hirn oder Hery der Schöpfung, alle Funktionen veranlaßt, wer möchte da als Künstler nicht wohnen? Im Schoße der Natur, im Urgrund der Schöpfung, wo der geheime Schlüssel zu allem verwahrt liegt?" (*Ibid.*)

11.

If the point marks the entrance into the cyclical time-space movement of creation, the elements of painting serve to articulate the life-giving force of nature because of their own dynamic character or nature as form-giving (*Formung*). Line progresses, as we saw, and it may figure growth. This extends to planes, for example as one draws a square and then another one-third larger than the first and so on. This kind of growth is not only two-dimensional but also three-dimensional, once the square becomes a cube (one may think of Euclid's *Elements*). A simple example would be a cube that grows on all sides. In turn this kind of progression occurs typically with tonality, in the movement between white and black that constitutes foreshadowing.⁶⁷ Traditionally foreshadowing is understood as a fooling of the eye that allows for the impression of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface. But here it is not a matter of fooling the eye: a movement does occur and is perceived, the movement of tones forward and backward that allows for foreshadowing to occur. Furthermore, color also functions as movement, contracting and expanding, coming forward or moving backward. In terms of composition, we have now moved outside the theory of perspective, and should think instead of the way certain lines, colors, and subjects overlap in the suspended space of Klee's paintings and drawings.

The postcard *The Sublime Side* (*Die erhabenen Seite*) (1923; plate 65) shows the growth upward of squares, rectangles, and circles together as they grow, expand, and become lighter in their expansion upward. *N. H. D* (*Province En-Aitch-Dee*) (*N. H. D. [provinz enhade]*) (1932; plate 64) is a fine example of the growth and progression of line, tone, and color into a whole or picture. In *Polyphonic Architecture* (*polyphone Architektur*) (1930; plate 62) one also sees such development, but in a "polyphonic" way; as a simultaneous seeing of various dimensions. In this picture squares expand to become cubes. At the same time, the tonal play between black and white sets up a three-dimensional movement that gives the picture a movement from back to front and vice versa. The colors are also carefully related so that red and green hold their tension in a way that sets up the atmosphere and sustains the space for the play of tones and the proliferation of lines that figure buildings moving upward. In terms of composition, neither the simultaneous movement of elements, nor their coming forward or receding depends on the rules of perspective. In terms of the difference between organic dynamic composition in Klee and perspective, one sees in *Agricultural Experimental Layout for Late Fall* (*Agricultur Versuchs anlage für den Spätherbst*) (1922; plate 6) the unfolding of geometric lines that could be understood in terms of perspective amid a broader unfolding of spaces and tonalities in movement.

67 For the treatment of the pictorial means (line, tone, and color), see Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 299–307. On color, see "Die Ordnung und das Wesen der reinen Farben... Die endliche und unendliche Bewegung der Farben auf der Fläche" (Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 466–511).

In considering these series of movements in *Polyphonic Architecture* (plate 62) characteristic to the basic elements of painting, one is led to a further observation and to the cosmological sense of Klee's work. In his work one of Klee's aims is to produce a "polyphonic painting." He develops this idea by taking further Delaunay's idea of simultaneous painting.⁶⁸ For Delaunay the vital movement of the world and its movement is simultaneity. For Klee, just as in music one may hear different themes and harmonies at once, in painting themes also may appear simultaneously.⁶⁹ But, as Klee himself states in his diary, painting may go further than music, in that it makes present spatially various moments of time at once.⁷⁰ As we saw above, line, tone, and color exercise specific movements. These movements are themselves simultaneous in a composition. One may go now beyond these movements to recognize that the dimension of time-space opened by the picture holds a further and more radical possibility. At the most basic level one can see that in a picture various sizes of the same figure will suggest progression and growth in space and time; that is, growth may be explicitly shown in various stages at once in a picture.⁷¹ But if this is the case, one may see in a picture temporality at work. If various views may be shown at once through superposition, this may be taken further to show the movement and life-giving force at work in various stages of development at once [precisely what the chronology of linguistic grammar would not allow]. This occurs as temporality may be engaged and shown in various moments simultaneously. Painting in its form-giving (*Formung*) may happen as an articulate exposure of the temporalizing movement or life-force of nature. In other words, more than one dimension of temporal development may be gathered in one picture, and each and all may be experienced at once as a single picture/experience.

Here the picture begins to engage temporality not as a static moment, not in terms of making a copy of the appearance of an object, or a superposition of objects, but in terms of a progression, as a dynamic event that goes back to a beginning and toward a future. We have moved from looking at painting as a two-dimensional representation of three-dimensional objects to the insight that paintings may expose one to the originary temporalizing movement in which things take a determinate and spa-

tially-temporally fixed form. At this point, the work of art, painting in this case, may be understood as the making visible of a movement that cannot be perceived in nature but that is exposed as the invisible originary temporalizing force, the life-giving movement behind all that is. Although the work as an object may be seen as a two-dimensional surface, the picture, given the characteristics of its basic elements, as well as this polyphonic possibility, works in an entirely different and radical manner from the traditional way of understanding painting as mere mimesis. In entering the world of the picture one enters a time-space of creation, through the form-giving of the artist and the work one is exposed to the life-giving movement of nature. Here appears in full the cosmological sense of Klee's painting. We saw earlier that the point introduces us into the cosmological time-space of creation, and that the progress of line, and the movement of tone, contrasts, and color occur as dynamics of the originary movement of that time-space continuum. Each composition is a play of diverse simultaneous dimensions. Now, we find that the picture holds a further possibility, namely the making visible of the force of time by the overlapping of compositions.

Polyphonic Architecture (plate 62) shows us a series of visual moments at once. In *Wall Plant* (plate 2) one finds other progressions. But in the case of the first (*Polyphonic Architecture*), depth, found in the receding and coming forth of various veils of vision, becomes a progression of moments, some before and some after the situation of the architectural construction. It is as if one could see the moment before the buildings were there and the moment after their construction. The crossing of color that occurs in *The Scales of Twilight* (*Die Waage der Dämmerung*) (1921; plate 5) is analogous to this veiling of simultaneous temporalities or dimensions of vision. Klee makes this overlapping an even more explicit technique in such works as *Äliup* (plate 7) in which various layers of color systems or moments are superposed through a pointillistic technique. In *Äliup* one sees a yellow system, a blue-red system, and a series of linear fragments that occupy yet another level.

One important corollary to polyphonic painting is Klee's development of a theory of color that does not follow the traditional idea of color oppositions in a two-dimensional surface. Klee taught color as a system of oppositions and relations that occurred as a spherical relationship.⁷² From what we have seen, this makes sense, because the color relationships are occurring in the picture with a series of movements that happen in a three-dimensional space, and moreover, through a movement in time-space that requires that color be understood in terms of extending-contracting-advancing-receding movements. One gets a sense of the need and working of such theory in pictures like *Geometric Spiral* (plate 27) in which colors expand forward and contract inward in a relationship that concerns the three-dimensional sense of relations that happen in such movement. Moreover, in terms of the temporal sense of polyphonic painting, *Äliup* (plate 7) shows that in order to control the color relations in place one must think in terms of spherical relations. This is the

68 Michael Baumgartner and Marianne Amiet-Keller, *Paul Klee: Melodie und Rhythmus*, exh. cat. (Bern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 71.

69 For a detailed treatment of music and painting in Klee's work see *Paul Klee: Melodie und Rhythmus*. Concerning the specific development of the idea of polyphonic painting in Klee's work, see in the same volume: "Vom 'Structuralrhythmus' zum 'polyphonen' Bildgefüge: Eine Einführung in Paul Klees Beschäftigung mit Malerei und Musik am Bauhaus," 71–85.

70 Already in 1917 Klee writes: "Simple motion strikes us as banal. The time element must be eliminated. Yesterday and tomorrow as simultaneous. In music, polyphony helped to some extent to satisfy this need.... Polyphonic painting is superior to music in that, here, the time element becomes a spatial element. The notion of simultaneity stands out even more richly. To illustrate the retrograde motion which I am thinking up for music, I remember the mirror image in the windows of the moving trolley" [Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964], #1081].

71 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 125–28.

72 Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 456–511.

same case for *The Scales of Twilight* (plate 5) where the same colors (red and blue) work differently before crossing, in crossing, and after crossing.

13.

From the poetic serenity of *Late Evening Looking Out of the Woods* (*Spät Abends aus dem Wald geblickt*) (1937; plate 8) to the many layered polyphonic *Printed Sheet with Pictures* (plate 36) if one follows Klee's vision and insight, one realizes that what was once taken to be a window into nature becomes a temporalizing event that draws mind and heart into the very movement of originary life-giving. In this sense, the work of art no longer copies nature; rather pictures "make visible those things that were seen in secret."⁷³ Our discussion has been guided by the same aim Klee has in his lecture of 1924, namely to introduce his vision of the work of art and its content by offering an introduction to a way of seeing that no longer identifies painting with nature. At the same time, in following this argument one sees that the work of art may offer insight into life and nature in their very originary movement. The artist and the philosopher touch at the limit of nature in seeking knowledge beyond all appearances. But they touch only to slip into the difference that we have marked from the outset of the discussion, since this insight is not, cannot be equated with conceptual knowledge organized around linguistic expression alone, nor with the study of nature as pragmatic facts to be analyzed and explained. Klee's work calls forth the philosophical gaze and marks its limit, but does so in a tantalizing manner, inviting, enticing, coercing, exposing the rational to the subconscious experience through which life-giving force may be channeled and may be experienced as works of art occur in their form-giving events.⁷⁴ ■

⁷³ Klee, "On Modern Art," 14.

⁷⁴ Klee's works respond to an aesthetic tradition that seeks the channelling of life-giving force through the form-giving creative force of the work of art. Such cosmological reading of Klee would put him, and us, close to the work of Joseph Beuys, who understood the work of art as a transferring of energy, as well as to the magic paintings of Haiti and Africa, close also to the famous photographs of the now extinct Selk'nam or Onas of Patagonia—images of living bodies that in their form-giving channel the life-giving force behind nature—painted bodies that could have very well been painted by Klee himself (their similarity with figures such as the one in *Printed Sheet with Pictures* [plate 36] is impossible to miss). In engaging Klee's works one finds a place perhaps wider than our present imagination, a place that in our being exposed to Klee's works remains for us to inhabit. (The Austrian anthropologist and priest Martín Gusinde traveled to Patagonia four times between 1918 and 1924. During his travels he photographed the Selk'nam or Onas and their rituals, which included painted bodies. The images were originally published in *Los indios de Tierra del Fuego*. Some of the images may be found in Anne Chapman, *Hain: Ceremonia de iniciación* [Las Lajas: Zagier and Urruty, 2008].)

Claudia Baracchi

Paul Klee: Self-Portrait of the Artist as a Tree

There are two mountains on which the weather is bright and clear, the mountain of the beasts and the mountain of the gods. But between them lies the crepuscular valley of human beings. If perchance one of them gazes upward, he is seized by a premonitory, unquenchable yearning, he who knows that he does not know, for those that do not know that they do not know and those who know that they know.

—Paul Klee¹

Da stieg ein Baum. O reine Übersteigung!

—Rainer Maria Rilke²

“My friend, in the sacred temple of Zeus at Dodona they said that the first prophetic speeches came into being from an oak tree. Now, for those of that time, given that they were not wise like you young people, it was sufficient, because of their simpleness, to hear from an oak and a rock, if only they should speak the truth; for you, however, perhaps it makes a difference who the speaker is and from what country. For you do not simply consider whether it is so or otherwise.”³ These words addressed by Socrates to his young interlocutor in the *Phaedrus* bear the trace of a remote symbolism—the tree as the pivot around which human life organizes itself in its distinctive exchange (in its conversation) with the other than human. The tree indicates the mediation between above and below, connecting earth and sky, the self-secluding and the maximally disclosed, dark density and luminescent rarefaction—finally, the invisible and the visible. It is, then, a locus of articulation, of harmonization in the literal sense of (con)junction.

In diverse cultures the tree points to the center of pulsating life, the pole on which the cosmos as a whole hinges.⁴ Again, we find a trace of this ancient figure in Plato, who imagines the movement of the spheres and of nature as such around an adamant column of light.⁵ Highlighted here is the cosmic tree as creative principle—the axis at once mysterious and fulgent, source and sustenance of generation. The cipher of the tree

¹ Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), #539.

² Rainer Maria Rilke, *Die Sonette an Orpheus 1* (Leipzig: Insel, 1923), 7.

³ Plato, *Phaedrus* 275b–c. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

⁴ See for instance Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1987).

⁵ Plato, *Republic* 10.614–21. Consider also the luminescent olive tree of the Qur’an, “neither in the West nor in the East” but in the center (*Sura* 24 “An-Nur” [“The Light”], 35); or the *ficus religiosa* (pipal tree, banyon tree) in the vicinity of which dwelled the naked goddesses of the pre-Aryon civilizations of the Indus Valley, orchoic indication of the feminine, generative character of the tree (whose Latin noun, *orbis*, is feminine although inflected in the masculine). Masculine and feminine, stretching upward and downward in its verticality and growing in its rotundity, the tree is a cipher of bisexuality, of the balanced complexity and completeness of the hermaphrodite. In the Upanishads the same tree (also called *oshwatho*), turned upside down, images the cosmos, rooted high above in Brahman, endlessly regenerating, growing its branches downward into the elemental (Kotko Upanishad 2.3.1). Again, under this tree the Buddha will be enlightened.

synthesizes the mystery of the divine and of life, and images the knowledge thereof—consider the Sephirothic tree of life described by the Zohar in terms of radiance and in connection with the power of word, or the biblical tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or the upside down banyan tree that the Bhagavad Gita⁶ identifies with the knowledge of the Veda.

For Joachim di Fiore, the twelfth-century mystic and theologian, the tree indicates worldly becoming, particularly in the aspect of growth and, hence, of temporality. It provides the image of the slow development and sedimentation of epochs, thanks to which Joachim articulates the succession of the ages in his vision of history.⁷ In the twentieth century Wassily Kandinsky still resorts to this symbol of quiet accretion to designate the millenary process of decantation, purification, and spiritualization of art.⁸

But the tree is not only a cosmic, cosmological, and cosmogonic figure.⁹ Beyond the living cosmos in its axial organization, cohesiveness, and dynamism, the tree evokes as well the human microcosm.¹⁰ Once more resorting to the image of a tree, Plato delineates the essential traits of the human: the human being is the upside down tree rooted in the sky and turning its flowering, creative organs toward the earth—an inversion intimating the human as a reflection, a mirror image of the divine.¹¹ In the human is the descent of the sky into the earth, and the earth's creative response. While belonging in the earthly element, and therefore fruitfully enacting itself in ways always local and irreducibly singular, the human being remains connected to the openness of the all-embracing sky, and in virtue of this may cultivate the consciousness of its own participation in a choral unity. Both celestial and abyssal, the human being stretches out and branches into heaven and earth.¹²

Allowing this image to vibrate in its broad symbolic resonance, ranging from the modest, young tree to the cosmic tree designating creation as well as the creator god, Paul Klee undertakes to illuminate the human being under the aspect of artistic creativity. More

precisely, in the 1924 lecture in Jena, Klee develops the image of the artist by reference to that of the tree.¹³ By offering a “glimpse into the painter's workshop,” Klee wishes to catch key elements of the human experience at large.¹⁴ Far from extraneous and “altogether apart,” the artist is “a being who, like you, unasked, was cast into a manifold world, and who, like you, willing or not must find his or her way.”¹⁵ The artist, then, shares the basic conditions with the rest of humankind, is planted in the same ground. Only he may perhaps be more apt at coursing through life in virtue of his “specific means”—“a being perhaps happier...than the one who does not create and achieves no release through real form-giving [Gestaltung].”¹⁶

In this context, Klee continues, the issue is casting light on “those parts of the creative process...which during the formation of a work unfold mostly in the subconscious [im Unterbewußten].”¹⁷ The task involves relieving “the formal aspect” of some of the “conscious” emphasis usually attributed to it, and setting into relief “the aspect of content.”¹⁸ Intuiting the artist's endeavor in its compositeness, organic character, and systemic integration (the artistic phenomenon in the likeness of a tree), Klee undertakes to unfold its ramifications and carefully join its various components:

Allow me to employ a simile, the simile of the tree. The artist has studied this manifold world and has, so we may suppose, somehow found his way in it, quietly. He is so well oriented that he can bring order to the flight of appearances and experiences. This orientation in the things of nature and of life, this multifarious ramified and branching order, I would liken to the root system of the tree. From here the juices flow to the artist, passing through him and through his eye. Thus he stands in the position of the trunk. Battered and moved by the power of the flow, he introduces what he is seeing into the work. Just as the crown of the tree visibly expands in every direction in time and in space, so does the work.¹⁹

The artist is presented first of all in his ordering work—not unlike the demiourgos in Plato's *Timaeus*, engaged in an act of cosmic craftsmanship that involves not so much creating out of nothing, but rather the arrangement and harmonization of that which is al-

6 Bhagavad Gita 15.2.

7 See especially Joachim's magnificent work of imaginal theology known as *Liber Figurarum*, in *Il Libro delle Figure dell'Abate Gioacchino da Fiore*, ed. L. Tandelli, M. Reeves, and B. Hirsch-Reich (Turin: SEI, 1990).

8 Wassily Kandinsky, “Malerei als reine Kunst,” *Der Sturm* 4, nos. 178–79 (Sept. 1913): 98–99.

9 This symbolic halo still suggestively resounds through one of Rilke's *Poèmes français*, where the walnut tree is envisioned in its stability and expanding roundness [Arbre qui, de sa place, / fièrement arrondi / tout autour cet espace / de l'été accompli, // rond et abondant, // toujours au milieu / de tout ce qui l'entoure— / arbre qui savoure / la voûte entière des cieux, // il développe en rond son être], vibrantly alive and yet unmoved, marking the passing of the seasons and yet abiding in plenitude. The poem suggests that this is at once an image of wisdom: Arbre qui peut-être / pense au dedans: / antique Arbre-maître, // Arbre qui se domine, / se donnant lentement / la forme qui élimine / les hasards du vent (“Le noyer” [1924], in *Poèmes français* [Paris: Hartman, 1933]).

10 Again, in Rilke's verse: O, der ich wachsen will, / ich seh hinaus, und in mir wächst der Baum (“Es winkt zu Führung fast aus allen Dingen” [1914], in *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. Ernst Zinn, vol. 2 [Frankfurt: Insel, 1956], 93).

11 Plato, *Timaeus* 90a.

12 In Jung's historical-psychoanalytic study on “The Philosophical Tree,” this archetype is examined as one of the most evocative figures of humanity; in the drawings by Jung's patients as well as the alchemists' descriptions of the *arbor philosophica*, the tree simultaneously bespeaks the source of life and maternal protection, individual renewal and fulfillment, knowledge and study. Carl G. Jung, “Der philosophische Baum,” in *Von den Wurzeln des Bewusstseins* (Zurich: Rascher, 1954).

13 The lecture was given on January 26, 1924 on the occasion of an exhibit at the Kunstverein in Jena and addressed the general public. It was first published in 1945 [Paul Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst* (Bern: Bentele)], subsequently translated into English by Paul Findlay [Paul Klee, *On Modern Art* (London: Faber and Faber, 1948)]. The quotations following are from the German text of the lecture included [under the title “Übersicht und Orientierung auf dem Gebiet der bildnerischen Mittel und ihre räumliche Ordnung”] in Paul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 1: Das bildnerische Denken*, ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1956), 81–96.

14 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” in *Das bildnerische Denken*, 81.

15 *Ibid.*, 81–82.

16 *Ibid.*, 82.

17 *Ibid.*, 81.

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*, 82.

ways already there, only in confusing disarray and fugitive.²⁰ The artistic labor sustains the round expansiveness of the work, propagating in all directions and indefinitely. At the same time, the artist is shown in his defenseless exposure to the wild flow of the worldly elements coursing through and around him—again, not unlike the condition of mortals in *Timaeus*, finding themselves in the midst of the sublunar world as in a raging river, overwhelmed by the currents of nutrition traversing them and the shaking and shifting of the elemental surroundings.²¹

The artist's self-portrait, thus, shows him at once in his imposing firmness and in his fragility. Like the tree, even if "battered and moved" the artist holds fast, presents a peculiar ability to withstand, endure, and even to orient himself and thrust his own ordering vision into the fleeting world. Klee's 1919 self-portrait *Absorption* (*Versunkenheit*) (plate 41), eloquently makes visible the movements of such an exuberant energy. The lithograph depicts the face of the artist in the effort of concentration. The mustering of superabundant resources surfacing yields an effect of nearly unsustainable intensity, as if the somatic traits were on the verge of being undone by it. At the same time, the visage conveys an impression of deep stillness and repose. Sunk into its own root, quietly balanced on the trunk of the neck and on the even shoulders, the shape of the head spreads out, light and effortless, like the crown of a tree, the facial features themselves echoing the shapes and veins of foliage. But the condition of the artist is mirrored just as much in the 1935 drawing of a little tree (*Little Tree*) (*Bäumchen*; plate 9), perhaps a young oak, conveying a sense of marked vulnerability and tentativeness—finite and far from invincible.

If the artist is similar in function to the trunk of a tree, then all possibility of artistic creation (of the passage and translation from roots to flowering branches) is predicated upon the nature of the intermediary, that is, upon the way in which the mediation takes place, the way in which the medial figure of the artist carries out and inflects the translation. For he or she is the translating. And he or she is always singular. In this light, it appears that the artist's way of life is as crucial to the artistic outcome as are his technical skills, studies, and talents—to the point that it could be said that a decisive aspect of the artist's task is tending to his own development and becoming, holding himself as his own most crucial work. The task of forming, of imposing shapes and configuration, is at one with that of self-formation. As Klee puts it, the creativity involved in art crucially demands an education in the art of life. Art is nurtured by arduous living. This is an ubiquitous concern in the artist's diaries—to quote one of the most concise (and earliest) formulations: "In the spring of 1901 I drew up the following program: First of all the art of life; then, as ideal profession, poetry and philosophy; as real profession, the plastic arts; and finally, for lack of an income, drawing illustrations."²²

The tree, then, stands as the figure (indeed, as the necessity) of a connection—a conjunction between above and below which is most evident in the function of the trunk. At stake is the exchange and interpenetration between the visible and the invisible, that which withdraws into non-manifestation and that which is inundated with light, imageless repose and the flow of mutability. At the center of such dynamics, the artist disciplines the passage from one side to the other and decides regarding their relationship—thus determining his comportment vis-à-vis the requirements of phenomenal verisimilitude, imitation, and representation. More broadly, however, it pertains to the human to inhabit such an intermediate field, to live in and as such a tension and, thus, to confront the ongoing work of balancing opposite forces, re-integrating the disaggregating tendencies, drawing one's course in the midst of divergent pulls, at each step finding a unique synthesis.²³

The labor of art is in the first place illuminated in its ascending thrust. Engaged in the movement from the depth, darkness, and

an individual. The art of mastering life is the prerequisite for all further forms of expression, whether they are paintings, sculptures, tragedies, or musical compositions. Not only to master life in practice, but to shape it meaningfully within me and to achieve as mature an attitude before it as possible. Obviously this isn't accomplished with a few general precepts but grows like nature. A *Weltanschauung* will come of itself; the will alone doesn't determine which direction will yield the clearest path; this is partly settled in the maternal womb and is ordained by fate.... Advancing along a spiritual path: with every step, more solitary.... Fearfully sober things, these: the canvas, the painting surface, the base. Not much more exciting: the tracing of lines, the treatment of forms. Over it all, light, the creation of space through light. Any content is prohibited for the time being. The purely pictorial style. How far away the true experience of these things still is! For the time being, the notion of the art of living is more fascinating" (#411/412). Note that it is not sufficient to be biologically alive in order to live, let alone to experience, as an individuated being. Yet, the necessary integration (the "art of life") need not bespeak a formative operation simply (willfully) imposed on the physiological/natural layer of life, as if the latter were primarily amorphous. On the contrary, becoming "an individual" entails acknowledging and trusting the guidance of nature, and essentially (if not exclusively) entrusting one's development to it—trusting, that is, that in its womb shapes and paths will make themselves available.

- 23 Klee underscores the in-between character of the domain designated by the trunk—the setting of artistic operation, the poetic laboratory, but also the human condition as such. In his *Bauhaus* notes, such a domain is the *Zwischenraum* or *Zwischengebiet* exposed to macroscopic and microscopic dynamism (between the "egg" and "death"), where the static is desirously open to the freedom of the dynamic (Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 5, 191, 388). Henry Corbin illumines the intermediate world as the *mundus imaginialis* in which the coming, the surfacing, of images is tended to (Corbin, "Mundus imaginialis ou l'imaginaire et l'imaginal," *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme* 6 [1964]: 3–26). The mention of Corbin is especially significant in this context, because of his development of the theme of imagination (in the wake of the Persian and Arabic philosophers) as *imaginatio vera*—as a mode of perception of the truth, in no way hierarchically subjugated by conceptual thinking and the discourses of rationality, but rather equiprimordial with them. In a distant and yet not unrelated environment, let us also recall Deleuze's elaborations of conceptuality as a matter of creativity, and hence the juxtaposition (on the shared ground of *poiesis*) of image and concept, and therefore of art, science, and philosophy (e.g., Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* [Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1991]). On imagination in connection with the present considerations: "Imagination is a tree," notes Gaston Bachelard, emphasizing the mediating role of the tree, its living in earth and wind, its integrative function (Bachelard, *La terre et les réveries du repos: Essai sur les images de l'intimité* [Paris: Corti, 1948], 300).

20 The locus classicus of the meditation on sensibility and experience in their fleeting character, restless motility, and constant dissipation is Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics* Beta 19.

21 Plato, *Timaeus* 42e–44c.

22 Klee, *Diaries*, #137. The following entry in the diary, from June 1902, is even more eloquent in this regard, as it lucidly sets into relief the themes of organic growth, finitude of the will, life and experience itself as not simply given but as tasks, needing assiduous exercise and attention: "Actually, the main thing now is not to paint precociously but to be or, at least, to become

invisibility of roots to the flowers, fruits, and ecstasies of making visible, art presents itself as transformation and transmutation, transfiguration and purification—as a genuinely alchemical operation in which the artist himself is the athanor, the vessel of a certain blending: “standing at the place allotted to him, the trunk, he does nothing other than gathering and leading forward that which comes from the depths. He neither serves nor rules, he only mediates. He truly holds a modest position. And the beauty of the crown is not he himself, it has only passed through him.”²⁴

And yet, the reverse movement is equally essential, descending from above into the dark earth—head down into the roots, to bring there study, exploration, focused perception.²⁵ “Our beating heart drives us down to the roots, deep down to the primordial ground [zum Urgrund].”²⁶ The point is less undertaking to overcome the opacity and resistance of the withdrawn (as if this were a possible, accessible task) than bringing to it a trained sensibility, the capacity for a refined and orienting receptiveness. It is not a matter of making the obscure clear, thus violating it in its obscurity, but learning to take the obscure in as obscure: learning to allow shapes and images to surface, even in their unintelligibility or non-conformity to visual data, and hence in their unsettling traits.²⁷ In this reverse sinking movement is imaged the in-depth study of nature, going down into it to receive orientation within it—or rather, to catch a glimpse of its disconcerting transformative power, of its infinite instability, velocity, and mutability. At stake in this going down is the possibility of understanding nature more profoundly and otherwise, of staying with it even in its invisibility and unfathomed mystery, divining the compositeness of phenomena and the togetherness, in them, of visible and invisible.²⁸

Again, the descent into the earth has to do with unearthing, however provisionally and intermittently, structures and hieroglyphs (“dream, idea, fantasy”²⁹) constituting the archaic ground and pulsating heart of phenomena, sustaining their ongoing change.³⁰ It involves remaining more intimately true to nature than naturalism, which treats the surface superficially, failing to understand its depth, i.e., non-simplicity and metamorphic vitality:

24 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 82.

25 On the twofold movement of ascent and descent, consider also the observations in the essay “Wege des Naturstudiums” (first published in *Stoffliches Bauhaus 1919–1923* [Weimar: Bauhaus, 1923]) and included in Klee, *Dos bildnerische Denken*, 63–68), especially regarding the common earthly root (upward way) and cosmic commonality (downward way).

26 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 93.

27 In the essay “exakte versuche im bereich der kunst” Klee addresses the study of what lies “of the root,” “below,” as an education in the “prehistory” of the visible—an education allowed by a shift in emphasis from finished form to function. The text was first published in *Bauhaus Zeitschrift für Gestaltung* 2.2 in 1928 and is included in Klee, *Dos bildnerische Denken*, 69–71. Klee returns to the question of prehistory in other notes as well, emphasizing the contact with it as the condition of artistic creation (*Dos bildnerische Denken*, 99 and 168).

28 In this sense art presents itself as genuine investigation—as a mode of approach, exploration, and analysis yielding on understanding of the world. Again, as recalled above by reference to Deleuze, we catch a glimpse of the intertwining of the arts, sciences, and philosophy as irreducible ways of knowledge.

29 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 93.

30 Such a descent has to do with reaching into the “mystery,” giving it form, as Klee observes in a preliminary sketch of “exakte versuche im bereich der kunst,” in Klee, *Dos bildnerische Denken*, 60.

From type to prototype! [Vom Vorbildlichen zum Urbildlichen!] Presumptuous will be the artist who arrests himself soon somewhere in the process. But chosen are those artists who today get through into the vicinity of that secret ground where the primordial law [das Urgesetz] nurtures all developments. There where the central organ of all temporal and spatial motility [Bewegtheit]—call it brain or heart of creation—activates every function; who would not, as an artist, dwell there? In the womb of nature, in the primordial ground [im Urgrund] of creation, where the secret key to all is guarded?³¹

In this plunging investigation the artist may dare to imagine radically reconfigured perceptual regimes—intimating, among other things, that there are languages beyond human languages (for instance, the speaking of trees); that beyond instituted and historically sedimented semantic codifications we need not posit inchoate chaos; thus, that immense horizons of communication, commonality, transposition, and structured interdependence have yet to be acknowledged. In this respect, consider the semiotic syntax exposed in the drawing *Perception of an Animal* (*Erkenntnis eines Tieres*) (1925; plate 4), or the texture of *Green Terrain* (*grünes Gelände*) (1938; plate 1), or the analysis of dimly lit receptacles in an untitled pastel, dated around 1937 (plate 26). In such a downward looking study (which permeates nature, percolates, divines), the root in the sky (the head and its luminosity) enters the earth and animates it with vision. The dreams, ideas, or fantasies thus released may “render the seen more or less vivaciously,” but above all “make that which is secretly beheld visible [sichtbar].”³²

The movement into the earth initiates a fruitful exchange with it, bringing the earth, in turn, out of itself. Earth surfaces, in response, are somehow brought out into the open, in a rapturous upward movement. The study in the invisible and of the invisible proleptically a movement upward, into the light, yielding images.³³ The earthly

31 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 93.

32 Ibid. Here Klee returns to the opening statement of the earlier essay “Schöpferische Konfession,” originally published in *Trübene der Kunst und der Zeit: Eine Schriftensammlung*, ed. Kosim Edschmid (Berlin: Eric Raiss, 1920). The essay is included in Klee, *Dos bildnerische Denken*, 76–80. See also “Wege des Naturstudiums,” 63. The ironic injunction to “make visible” [sichtbar machen] is in turn inscribed in the 1926 *To Make Visible* (plate 59). At the source of the creative drive one already finds scratches and traces of writing—an inscription, a finely incised orbesque...

33 It is barely the case to mention, by mere osmosis, the centrality of the earth, in connection with the artistic phenomenon, in Heidegger’s essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” (conceived in the mid-1930s and published in *Martin Heidegger, Holzwege, in Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 [Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950]). It is clear, however, that the themes of the origin of the work from out of the earth or *physis*, art as the event and advent of disclosure, and above all the connection between earth and sky are developed by the two thinkers in incommensurable directions. Suffice it to note the tension between Heidegger’s elaboration of the conjunction as strife (earth and world, constitutively joined and divided in the erection of the Greek temple) and Klee’s deployment of the symbolism of the tree. Here I limit myself to referring to Stephen H. Watson, “Heidegger, Paul Klee, and the Origin of the Work of Art,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 60, no. 2 (Dec. 2006): 327–57; Siegbert Peetz, “Welt und Erde: Heidegger und

root, stirred by an imaginal apprehending, sends forth offshoots with ascending energy: wings and birds, jugglers, flights, ghosts, tumblers, insects, *eidola*, endless variations on the theme of air. Consider, in this regard, *Concert on the Branch (Konzert auf dem Zweig)* (1921; plate 40), *Tighrope Walker (Seiltänzer)* (1923; plate 20), *Entertainer in April (Gaukler im April)* (1928; plate 22), and *Entertainer Festival (Gaukler-fest)* (1932; plate 23). Or the joyous crossing of the sky (constellated by tree, celestial city, planetary graphemes) in *The Scales of Twilight (Die Waage der Dämmerung)* (1921; plate 5), with the precarious acrobat balancing within the patterns of vectors of force and world lines.

In the translation from the depth of the roots into the height of the branches, however, deformation occurs. The image, brought forth out of the roots, and coursing through the trunk, is diverted in its flow. The artist is a locus of inflection or deflection, and this is not due to subjective, arbitrary motifs, let alone to caprice or technical deficiency. The trunk is a bridge, a place of passage in between, and as such belongs in the broader, more articulate system of the living tree: root and branches, soil and air, moisture and warmth, and lives variously circulating, intersecting, interpenetrating. Himself an organism, the artist belongs in the organic structure of aliveness traversing and surrounding him—a togetherness vibrant and rippling. As a place of passage and transmutation, the artist assists the metabolism of nature in its endless work of self-regeneration and self-renewal, necessarily and irreducibly entailing distortion:

I have already spoken of the relationship of crown to root, of work to nature, and have elucidated the difference by reference to the two different domains of earth and air, and the correspondingly different functions of depth and height. In the work of art, likened to the crown of the tree, at stake is the deforming necessity due to the entrance into the specific dimensions of the imaginal [*des Bildnerischen*]. For there stretches out the rebirth of nature.³⁴

Distortion is originary and inevitable. Deformation inheres in the very emergence of form. This is so because at stake is not a movement from image to image, a translation internal to the visual paradigm, let alone a reproduction. Rather, it belongs to the artistic endeavor to throw bridges across radically discontinuous realms and toward the image, to receive transmissions and send them forth along evanescent paths, to sustain the visible propagation of invisibility—the differing and deferred flowering of roots.³⁵

Paul Klee, "Heidegger Studies 2 (1995): 167–87; and Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1919–1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

34 Klee, "Übersicht und Orientierung," 86.

35 Not surprisingly, Klee's research is extremely relevant for Merleau-Ponty. This is clear, e.g., in *L'œil et l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), but also in the systematic developments in his last courses at the Collège de France and *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964). Here I limit myself to referring to Mauro Carbone, "'Rendere visibile': Merleau-Ponty e Paul Klee," in *Fenomenologia e arte: Immagini e figure riflesse nella filosofia*, ed. Markus Ophälders (Milan: Mimesis, 2005), 99–110.

Such is the case for the artist compelled to study nature, not only in its fruits coming to the fore, but in its foregrounding and self-dissimulating labor—the inconspicuous granting, the teeming, variegated energies pervading it.

And yet, it is precisely in connection with the necessity of deformation that the artist on this path of research experiences his insularity, his alienation from the people of his time. Paradoxically enough, he must undergo the *pathos* of severance and disintegration with respect to his own environment. Klee expounds the basic features of the polemical encounter with his contemporaries:

No one would demand that the tree form the crown precisely like the root. Anyone would understand that between above and below there can be no exact specular relation. It is clear that different functions in different elemental domains must yield vivid divergences. But precisely the artist is at times denied these divergences from the model, which are necessary from a creative standpoint. This has gone so far in eagerness that he has even been charged with powerlessness and deliberate falsification.³⁶

The tree, then, finds itself rooted in unpropitious terrain, exposed to hostile elements—"battered and moved," in fact, on the verge of being uprooted. The people of the present time cannot, for the most part, meet the artist where he is, on his plane and at his place—at the center, in the experience of dynamic contacts. In this regard, a series of nine drawings from 1933 (plates 46–54) is telling in its iconographic and stylistic uniformity: the people brandishing a superficial naturalism in defense of the tradition is the same people violating, hunting, and discriminating.³⁷ It is one and the same people that admires the equestrian monument, holding it as the model of the artwork (*The Work of Art [das Kunstwerk]*; plate 53) and practices "manhunting" (*Manhunt [Menschenjagd]*; plate 49). Again, the common intonation of these drawings shows that it is one and the same people that unimagineratively clings to images, in the poverty of appearances, and perpetrates violence in a variety of modes—whether by thrusting the spear or pointing the finger (*Accusation in the Street [Anklage auf der Strasse]*; plate 47), *Violence [Gewalt]*; plate 46), *Barbarian Mercenary [Barbaren-Söldner]*; plate 51), *Double Murder [Doppel mord]*; plate 50), and *Militarism of Witches [Militarismus der Hexen]*; plate 52).

The only intimacy displayed by the conduct of pencil and chalk is with the figures of those hunted: the closer look at the emigrants in *Emigrating [auswandern]*; plate 54), the carefully described gesture

36 Klee, "Übersicht und Orientierung," 82.

37 This is of course an outstanding year, for both the Bauhaus and Klee himself, who was forced to resign his post at the Düsseldorf Academy and retreat to Bern.

of surprise of the hunted caught in an interior in *Manhunt* (*Intime Scene*) (*Menschenjagd [Intime Scene]*; plate 48), or the attentive contrast between the pointed shapes of the aggressors and the airy, almost angelic figure of the prey, softly dissipating already in its flight (*Manhunt*). The rest are black heaps of extinguished life, nearly indistinct traces of organicity, disarticulated shadows.

The environment of the artist, then, is neither especially responsive to nor supportive of art's necessities. Klee seems to describe such a context in *Medley of Little People* (*allerlei kleines Volk*) (1932; plate 29) or *Small World* (*Kleinwelt*) (1914; plate 34), both of which entail a gaze from above—a bird's or god's remote gaze, revealing what is seen as both microscopically irrelevant and remarkable in its overall structure. Yet, the artistic path he has taken necessitates the divergence from customary models and imitative compartment. It is in this predicament that the desire arises to divine and foster other modes of humanity, to explore more fully being human and being together, to prepare the ground for an as yet unseen people. In the joyful projection of image, in the bringing forth through the trunk, all the way into the leaves, is folded the artist's longing for a people that is missing. But imagining an other people, calling for a people to come, means also being involved in the creative effort of bringing it forth, the commitment to contributing to such an arrival. This is also why this lecture is above all an attempt at educating, at informing the public—not in the sense of giving information, but rather of shaping sensibility, training the gaze, opening it up to another age. Such an endeavor is complementary and at the same time irreducible to Klee's teaching commitments in academic or professional contexts, paradigmatically at the Bauhaus.

The overall purpose of the Jena lecture is explicit from the start. It is important to underscore that at stake is not simply a declaration of poetics, whether individual or collective, let alone a theoretical decoding of the works exhibited. Klee displays in no uncertain terms his concern with the visual education required for approaching the work of art and the many-layered deformations it presents—an education nurturing the perception of the work as a "phenomenon of simultaneous multi-dimensionality,"³⁸ despite the inadequacies of didactic language and the strictures of language as such in its diction:

But perhaps I can make myself understood to the point that the phenomenon of the multi-dimensional contact may be experienced, in one work or another, more easily and quickly. As a humble mediator, who does not identify himself with the crown, I may perhaps bring into your view a rich, radiant light.³⁹

In accordance with this illuminative pedagogical program, Klee proceeds to a formal analysis of the dimensions of measure, weight, and quality, developed through the examination of line, tone, and color. The study and mastery of the formal elements constitutes the culmination of the artist's "conscious creation" and

"professional activity,"⁴⁰ and it is through such a knowledge of the craft that it may become possible for the artist "to reach out into dimensions far removed from the conscious process."⁴¹ The conscious endeavor must be pursued to its limit and may, at the limit, make possible its own transgression—as if in a movement of self-transcendence. Here, Klee warns, lies the most severe danger, for this is "the place where one can miss the greatest and most substantial contents and fail, despite the soul's most exquisite talent in that direction."⁴²

But what should be highlighted at this juncture is that the artist is a mediator in yet another sense. To be sure, mediating between nature and art, he brings forth the artistic creation (as we saw, mediation, the frequentation of thresholds, is presented as a necessary condition for fecundity and fruitfulness). However, mediating between the work of art and a public coarse and unprepared, he strives to bring forth another human being. Sharing fragments of the artistic experience and its discipline with the public, he undertakes to teach, reshape, bring about transformation in the public's basic attitude.

Thus, when Klee notes: "besides, I do not wish at all to present the human being as he is, but only as he also could be"⁴³—we may hear this statement in its twofold range of implications. Doubtlessly at issue here is the investigation of phenomena and the presentation of the human being through artistic work (the question of deformation and the contestation of *mimesis*). And yet, equally at issue is the investigation and bringing forth of the human being through the conscious work of relation, exchange, education. The question of abstraction from representational codes and the issue of psychopolitical renewal echo each other, indeed, follow the same laws. Both entail a descent. Indeed, drawing back into the roots, standing "at the place allotted to him,"⁴⁴ that of the trunk, the artist receives the strength to withstand the battering and vicissitudes, whether elemental or political. Moreover, such a descent into unlit prehistory yields insight. Whether going deep down into nature's workshop so as to set up the artist's workshop or going down into the fabric of collective dynamics so as actively to intervene in them, the call is for exploring potentiality and possibility, divining the latent, releasing the dormant, blind, or blindfolded into its own unfolding. It is a matter of construction and formation—of assisting in the advent of the work that is not yet, of the people as yet missing, of a flowering perhaps to come.⁴⁵

40 Ibid., 88.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 95. This statement is but one variation on an abiding theme in Klee. A journal entry from early 1901 already exposes the issue lucidly and its implications: "Thoughts about the art of portraiture. Some will not recognize the truthfulness of my mirror. Let them remember that I am not here to reflect the surface (this can be done by the photographic plate), but must penetrate inside. My mirror probes down to the heart. I write words on the forehead and around the corners of the mouth. My human faces are truer than the real ones" (Klee, *Diaries*, #136).

44 Klee, "Übersicht und Orientierung," 82.

45 Italo Calvino notes that Klee is "an artist possessing a great genetic force.... He is one giving himself over to future art. All he does is opening up new avenues, which perhaps he himself is not that interested in developing, for right away he is concerned with opening up new ones, therefore everything he does is a gift to others." Thus, he adds, "Klee's overall image remains

38 Klee, "Übersicht und Orientierung," 86.

39 Ibid.

In the course of his formal analysis, Klee returns to the difficult relationship of the artist to the public, a relationship intermittently displacing and constellated by “vehement misunderstandings.”⁴⁶ The layman seems to haunt the artist as an introjected form of consciousness, silently making itself heard:

While the artist is still striving to group the formal elements with each other purely and logically, so that each in its place is necessary and none clashes with the other, a layman, watching from behind, already utters the devastating words: “But that is still very unlike uncle!” The artist, if his nerves are disciplined, thinks to himself: “Uncle here, uncle there! I must keep building.... This new brick is, to begin with, a bit too heavy and in my view moves the whole thing too much to the left; I must add a not insignificant counterweight on the right to establish the equilibrium.” And he keeps adding on one side and then the other, until finally the scales are even.⁴⁷

Again, Klee emphasizes that he is not concerned with physical appearances as correlates of stable paradigms—whether allegedly metaphysical or crystallized through habit and familiarity. He is concerned, rather, with building and with constructive necessities. As he proceeds to explicate, he is likewise concerned with the investigation of appearances in their depth, of phenomena haunted and stirred by the no longer and not yet phenomenal. Here lies the question of the visible in its temporal unfolding, as the becoming never fully fathomed in its full range, and thus exceeding and subverting all pretense at stable codifications. With respect to becoming, all iconographic conventions and sensory habituation constitute an unwarranted prejudice. Sensation itself is irreducible to biological automatism, and can thus be cultivated, refined, trained—opening up to unprecedented vicissitudes:⁴⁸

Therefore the contention revolves less around the question of the existence of an object, than around its appearance at any given time, around its way [Art]. I will hope that the layman, who in pictures always hunts [Jagd macht] for his particularly beloved object, may gradually die out within the range of my environment and, from now on, come to meet

me at most as a helpless ghost. For one only knows one’s own objective passions. And admittedly, in some cases, one is very delighted if perchance a familiar face emerges, as if of its own accord, in the artifact.⁴⁹

The human to come is envisioned in the fading authoritativeness of the correspondence between formal structures and objective content—of the model to which the work of formation would have to conform. Questioning and deactivating such an imposing automatism (which holds formation hostage and demotes it to reproduction and conformism) is central to the venture of artistic as well as political creativity. The mood of such a contestation may perhaps be glimpsed in the movement of oblique withdrawal and the gesture of refusal, at once soft and determined, in the 1940 drawing *No! [Nein!]* (plate 42).

Crucial in entertaining the possibility of other modes of humanity, thus, is the cultivation of receptivity—free and exploratory like a “grazing animal.”⁵⁰ It is a matter of learning to sustain the fact that, beyond our preconceptions and projections, “each formation, each combination will have its own peculiar constructive expression, each form its face, its physiognomy.”⁵¹ It is a matter of learning how to look and being looked at in return, allowing the rest of life to have its own life and come forth accordingly. For “the objective images look at us serene or severe, more or less tense, comforting or dreadful, suffering or smiling.”⁵² But of course, the task of integrating such a posture can at most be inceptively announced: a vision delineating the horizon of a possible evolution—perhaps. In connection with the problem of the people to come, the people that is not yet, we may suggestively turn to Klee’s numerous evocations of philosophers, birds, and other winged figures. But it may not be inappropriate to emphasize, here, those works especially conveying transformations still in progress, intermediate states, hybrid progressions, and thresholds: *Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying* (*geht kaum mehr, fliegt noch nicht*) (1927; plate 15), *From Gliding to Rising* (*von Gleiten zu Steigen*) (1923; plate 18), *Uneven Flight* (*unebene Flucht*) (1939; plate 14), and *Superior Bird* (*höherer Vogel*) (1940; plate 16).

Such, then, would be the transformative and transformed domain of the artist’s labor. But Klee lingers on his discussion of artistic creativity, attempting to illuminate further the artist’s freedom from the presumption of visual givenness—a freedom often leading to “what appears to be such an arbitrary ‘deformation’ of the natural outward form.”⁵³ Yet, far from arbitrary, childlike, or even volubly self-indulgent, artistic freedom is emphatically disclosed in its rigor and necessity. For, unlike the “many realist critics,”⁵⁴ the artist, rather

this universe of the possibilities of forms, always very recognizable. Klee is so rich, so generous, but at the same time never eclectic, always himself” (Colvino, *Mondo scritto, mondo non scritto* [Milon: Arnoldo Mododori, 2002], 66–67).

46 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 89.

47 *Ibid.*

48 As an instance of Klee’s variations on a given theme (more precisely, on the figure of the tree), highlighting moments of his stylistic trajectory from youth to the late works, see the brief survey in Poul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 2: Unendliche Naturgeschichte*, ed. Jürg Spiller (Bosel: Schwabe, 1970), lxiii–lxix.

49 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 90.

50 Klee, “Schöpferische Konfession,” 78.

51 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 91.

52 *Ibid.*

53 *Ibid.*, 92.

54 Later in the same lecture Klee will insist: the realist [ony “Mister X”] would

than attaching “a cogent significance to natural outward forms,” is more concerned with “the forming powers.”⁵⁵ Klee insists on the crucial shift in focus from the “final forms” to the “natural process of creation.”⁵⁶ What absorbs the artist and his resources is the unfolding of becoming in its time and place, the development of beings in ever changing, ever unstable and unfinished shapes, revealing a field of possibilities as yet unexhausted and the ongoing character of origination.

The “natural process of creation” constantly brings to visibility (makes visible, more broadly perceptible) the heretofore secluded and invisible. Artistic creation resonates with such a natural flow, reverberates its motility, ongoing labor, and unraveling. Accordingly, the artist cultivates the keen awareness that the world in its present configuration “is not the one and only of all worlds.”⁵⁷ Above all, “with a penetrating glance he looks at the things that nature leads before his eyes already formed,”⁵⁸ divining in them their provenance and possible development, that which is no more and not yet visible. He thus contemplates time in and as the invisible infused in the mutable visibility of things. It is in this sense that his eye is piercing. And of course such a contemplation at once probes into the operations of nature and echoes them, deepens the intimacy with nature’s invisible forces and assists them, draws closer into natural creativity and prolongs it. Not unlike the joyful god at work, the artist appears closest to the act of *natura naturans*.⁵⁹

The deeper he looks, the more easily he can stretch his point of view from today to yesterday, the more he is impressed by the only essential image of creation, as genesis, rather than by the ready-made image of nature. Then he allows himself the thought that creation can hardly be already complete today, and thus stretches the act of world creation backward and forward: imparting duration to genesis [*der Genesis Dauer verleihend*].⁶⁰

It is here that the proximity of artistic and political projects is delineated most sharply. Thus understood, the artistic endeavor emerges in its essentially utopian character—as a visionary striving to uncover, reveal, and lead forth that which may lie latent, as yet invisible, yet to be found, invented, and released. Here we catch sight of the artist’s consciousness stretching out, agile and unrestrained, to embrace and compose the most comprehensive view, including that which is nowhere now.

exclaim in great indignation: “Those would be natural forms? This surely is bad handicraft” (ibid., 93).

55 Ibid., 92.

56 Ibid.

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 On the artist as god, creating naturalness anew, see “Wege des Naturstudiums,” 67. On art as a resemblance of creation and on the comforting experience of god-like bringing forth, see “Schöpferische Konfession,” 79–80. In a note on the concept of analysis, Klee deliberately lays out the biblical overtone of the language of genesis he frequently employs (*Das bildnerische Denken*, 99).

60 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 92.

Klee outlines, in a minor mode, the romantic motif of the ecstatic mind, longing to be one with all, unbound, expansive:⁶¹ “He goes still further! He says to himself, remaining on this side: this world [at one time] looked different and [a later time] will look different.”⁶² Then, in a vertiginous turn beyond this place, it seems likely to him that “on other stars” altogether “other forms” have come to be.⁶³ Klee pointedly notes: “Such a mobility on the natural paths of creation is a very good formative school [*Formungs-schule*]. It has the potential to move the maker [*den Schaffenden*] from the ground up, and he, himself in motion, will care for the freedom of the development, along his own paths of formation.”⁶⁴

As observed above, the artist’s *ethos*, the mark of his singularity, is as essential to the outcome of the creative labor as technical mastery and formal lucidity. Indeed, the way in which the artist steers through life may either ensure or compromise the free development and realization of the work: “This being the situation, one must make a concession to the artist, if he regards the present stage of the world of appearances immediately concerning him as accidentally fixed, temporally and locally fixed. As all too limited in contrast to his deeper vision and more vibrant feeling.”⁶⁵ Whether reaching out to the outermost reaches of the cosmos or reaching into the fibers of life, witnessing its microscopic shapes in restless mutation, the artist pursues the discipline of transcendence or overcoming of the illusion of fixity. In this perspective, sensing the unmastered movement of life is at once a matter of undergoing, of surrender, and a rigorously cultivated exercise—the exercise of “mobility” (*Beweglichkeit*), of a “freedom that does not lead to determinate phases of development, which in nature once were exactly so, or will be, or could exactly be so...on other stars.”⁶⁶ The artist’s freedom “merely demands its right”: the right to be, to unfold according to its own necessity, “to be mobile, just as great nature is mobile.”⁶⁷

Thus stretched to the limit, at the limit not unlike a creator god, the artist enjoys the sweetness and endures the strictures of the endeavor:

Sometimes I dream of a work of really great breadth, ranging through the whole elemental, objective, content-related, and stylistic region. This will certainly remain a dream, but it is good even now and then to entertain this possibility today still vague. Nothing can be rushed. It must grow, it should grow of itself, and if the time ever comes for that work, then so much the better! We must still go on seeking. We have found parts, but not yet the whole. We do not

61 Here at stake is not so much romanticism in its “crassly pathetic” stage, but rather that “Romanticism that merges in the all [*die im All aufgeht*]” (ibid.). Elsewhere in his notes Klee associates romanticism with dynamism, and speaks of abstraction in art as a kind of romanticism without pathos, particularly as a response to the atrocity of the surrounding world (*Das bildnerische Denken*, 191, 461).

62 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung,” 92.

63 Ibid., 93.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

yet have this ultimate power, for: no people is supporting us [uns trägt kein Volk].⁶⁸ But we seek a people, we began with this...⁶⁹

"We," already in the plural, "began with this." He concludes

68 This phrase [which he renders as *le peuple manque*], constitutes an orienting catalyst for Deleuze, precipitating many moments of political imagination and igniting a vision of art in its revolutionizing power. At least three such moments should be mentioned here, because of their explicit citations of Klee and, above all, because they reveal the persistence, pervasiveness, and evocativeness of Klee's meditation within the philosopher's workshop. First, the essay "Un manifesto di meno" ("One Less Manifesto," originally published in Carmelo Bene and Gilles Deleuze, *Sovrapposizioni* [Milan: Feltrinelli, 1978]): Here art is developed in its politically poetic vocation. Its task is not obtaining the consensus of the majority, appealing to everyone, let alone didactically representing the people's plight and class conflict, but rather nurturing the conditions for the cultivation of consciousness in a minor mode, for the exercise of a minority consciousness, as everyone's potentiality for becoming. Not that the artist enjoys a decisive authority in this respect: his authority is only "the authority of a perpetual variation, in opposition to the power or despotism of the invariant...the authority, the autonomy of one stuttering, one who has conquered the right to stutter" (89). It is the authority of the foreigner—of one who has become a foreigner "in one's own language" (79), finally, the authority of the nomad, the bastard, the animal. Here Deleuze echoes Klee's statement in Bene's inflection, conveying more a sense of solitude [the artist operating in a vacuum] than merely a perceived lack of support: "Everyone claims to be part of the people, in the name of majoritarian language, but where is the people? 'It is the people which is lacking'" (90).

Second, consider the 1987 lecture "Qu'est-ce que l'acte de création?" (transcription of the recording at www.webdeleuze.com). Deleuze lingers on the theme of art as an act of resistance: "Only the act of resistance resists death, both in the form of the work of art and in the form of a struggle of human beings. And what relation is there between the struggle of human beings and the work of art? The closest and, to me, most mysterious relation. Exactly what Paul Klee meant when he said: 'You know, the people is lacking [Vous savez, le peuple manque]. The people is lacking and, at the same time, it is not lacking. The people is lacking, this means that...this fundamental affinity between the work of art and a people that does not yet exist, is not and will never be clear. There is no work of art that does not appeal to a people that does not yet exist.'" Third, consider *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* where this line of thinking develops in its systematic force: "The creation of concepts in itself appeals to a form of future, calls for a new earth and a people which do not yet exist... Art and philosophy converge on this point, the constitution of an earth and a people which are lacking, as the correlate of creation" (104). This is clearly not a matter of fabrication: "The people is internal to the thinker because it is a 'becoming-people,' just as the thinker is internal to the people, as a no less unlimited becoming. The artist or the philosopher are unable to create a people, they can only invoke it with all their resources. A people can create itself only in abominable sufferings, and cannot occupy itself with art or philosophy. But the books of philosophy and the works of art also contain in turn their unimaginable amount of suffering which allows for the presentment of the advent of a people. They have in common the fact of resisting, resisting death, servitude, the intolerable, shame, the present" (105). *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?* closes by evoking the merging of philosophy, art, and science, as differing modes of encountering and indicating alterity. These are the ending lines: "In this immersion, we could say one draws from chaos the shadow [l'ombre] of the 'people to come,' as art calls it, but also philosophy, science: the people-mass, people-world, people-brain, people-chaos. Non-thinking thought that dwells in all three, like the non-conceptual concept of Klee or the inner silence of Kandinsky. It is here that concepts, sensations, functions become undecidable, just as philosophy, art, and science become indiscernible, as if they would share the same shadow, which extends across their different nature and does not cease to accompany them" (223). Deleuze returns to "the people that is lacking" in various other contexts, among which are Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1975), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), and Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et clinique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1993).

69 Klee, "Übersicht und Orientierung," 95.

referring to the experimental community already under way at the Bauhaus, not some kind of chimera but an established beginning. A patient god having reckoned with his own finitude, capable of waiting, of sustaining frustration and partiality, the artist keeps pursuing at once the work of art and his connection with the people to come—a twofold search that is also a giving, for here "we give all we have."⁷⁰ The gift of this research unearthing the unprecedented may leave nothing, no one, intact. "More we cannot do."⁷¹ ■

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

David Farrell Krell

Klee and Novalis: Apprentices at Saïs

For Alexander Bida

Ulrich to Agathe: "But consider an actual work of art: have you never had the feeling that something in it reminds you of the smell of sparks coming off a knife that's being sharpened on a grindstone? It's a cosmic, meteoric, lightning-bolt sort of smell, celestially uncanny!"

—Robert Musil¹

A whole range of themes touching the art of Paul Klee occurred to me when I received the generous invitation to participate in these events—the exhibition, *Paul Klee: Philosophical Vision; From Nature to Art*, and the Boston College conference—and I wanted very much to be sufficiently competent to write on each of them, but I was not. Allow me to begin by listing some of these attempts that remained mere temptations.

First, I was struck by Klee's use of the words *Tupfen* and *Stricheln* to describe his dabbing, splotching, smudging, stippling, and combing the surfaces of his sketches and paintings—that recurrent roughening of their texture, as though to make the otherwise severe geometries more livable. Max Ernst's method of *frottage* may be an important inspiration here, although for Klee it is a matter, according to one art historian, of "dulling the sharp edges" by means of "accidental side-effects," even "dirty" side-effects.² Recall Klee's own words from his "Creative Credo" of 1918: "The most variegated lines. Spots. Stipples. Surfaces smooth. Surfaces stippled, combed. Wavy movement. Inhibited, articulated movement. Countermovement. Weft, fissure. Brickwork, fishscales" (*Die verschiedensten Linien. Flecken. Tupfen. Flächen glatt. Flächen getupft, gestrichelt. Wellenbewegung. Gehemmte, gegliederte Bewegung. Gegenbewegung. Geflecht, Gewebe. Gemauertes, Geschupptes*).³ I thought I might break into the sophisticated and technically demanding world of art criticism and art history with a learned monograph on Klee entitled *Smudges*, in German, *Kleekse*, or perhaps more keenly, *Kleeckse*. Naturally, I would categorize and classify the collective smudges of the corpus, all nine-thousand-plus works. *Smudges*, by D. F. K., in thirteen volumes. Luckily, I awoke from this feverish dream.

1 Robert Musil, *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, vol. 1 (Berlin: Rowohlt, 1930), 960.

2 Daniel Kupper, *Paul Klee* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2011), 91. I am indebted to two commentaries on Klee's life and work: first, Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Paul Klee: In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1961); second, Daniel Kupper's *Paul Klee*. I will cite them often, even when it is Klee speaking in his lectures, books, letters, and journal entries. A half-century separates these two accounts, both published in the popular series of Rowohlt's *Monographien*. Whereas the earlier monograph tends toward hagiography, the second devotes much of its time to demythologization. Both volumes are valuable, however, the first more inspiring than the second, the second more analytical than the first. Kupper also cites Klee's writings and letters in detailed footnotes, and I will cite him especially when he reproduces Klee's *Selbstzeugnisse*.

3 Paul Klee, "Beitrag für den Sammelband: 'Schöpferische Konfession,'" in *Schriften: Rezensionen und Aufsätze*, ed. Christian Geelhaar (Cologne: DuMont, 1976), 118ff.; Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 48.



Fig. 1: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *At the Blue Bush (beim blauen Busch)*, 1939/801. Colored paste on paper on cardboard, 26.5 x 21 cm, Wilhelm Hack Museum, Ludwigshafen, Inv. Nr. 458/32.

Second, I thought of writing on Kandinsky's and Klee's meditations on the point, line, and plane as a generative act, and I wanted to read these two through the lens of Hegel's early Jena and later Berlin lectures on the philosophy of nature. For Hegel's physics of point, line, plane, and solid is a physics of space, time, and motion as an ongoing process of spirit. Hegel's is a physics for artists and architects, a physics "with wings," a physics for Klee, especially the Klee who writes, "The only timeless entity is the most minute, the dead point in itself. When this point becomes movement and line, it demands time, and so it is when the line metamorphoses to plane, or in the movement from planes to spaces."⁴ Then, pushing the envelope a bit, I thought I might ask whether the point, which Klee regards as nonmotion, hence as the nothing, is not black-on-white and not even gray-on-gray, but the "gray point" or "gray test"; it would be the colorless all-color that Melville sees in the palsied whiteness of *Moby-Dick* or of a white shark, which is doubtlessly an off-off-white. Gray-on-gray, you will remember, is the very color of philosophy for Hegel, and I dreamt of re-reading Hegel's philosophy of history as well as his lectures on aesthetics in search of this noncolor, this *caput mortuum*, for Klee the color of pre-beginnings and post-ends, but I awoke from that dream too.

Third, I was struck—as all are struck—by the childlike character of so much of Klee's prints and paintings. A dangerous topic, this, one that understandably angered the artist himself later in his life, already in 1924 but especially after 1933, even though he

certainly knew how to tap the resources of those early anxieties that we call childlike innocence and simplicity. I thought I might focus on a single devastating canvas from the year 1939, *At the Blue Bush (beim blauen Busch)* (fig. 1), with its coded children's songs and promise of rendezvous, *Hänschen klein bleibt allein*, and *Stell' Dich Ein*, with its stilts instead of legs and its impending removal into the shadowed vale, *taleinwärts*, all of it in order to say, as the legs, torso, head, and hair spell it out, with the letters A, D, E, the South German way to say adieu, *ada* or *ade*. Yet who would have the heart? Not I.

Fourth, I was struck by the terrible illness and death of this man, himself fascinated by the theme of the mask. Death by a disease (progressive systemic scleroderma) I had never heard of and whose cruelty and perversity astonished me. And to think of the unbelievable productivity of those last years, 1939 above all, with its average of three finished works per day! Although there is nothing to laugh about here, or precisely because of that, I could not help but seek rescue in an imagined scene of a future Woody Allen film in which the inept and desperate Manhattan art dealer—played by you-know-who—encourages the artist by complaining, "Only fourteen masterpieces this week—I hate to see you letting yourself go like this!" The bad taste of my little scene is simply an awkward expression of the miracle of those last years, a miracle in the midst of misery. As the young Klee said of Van Gogh, "You will permit me to be terrified" (*Man erlaube mir, zu erschrecken*).

Fifth, but really first, I thought about music—my own little corner in the arts—and about Klee's musicianship. How much there would be to say, for example, about Klee's 1929 *Polyphonic Currents (polyphone Strömungen)*, but all of it so risky, so tenuous, since one hopes to make connections between two art forms each of which is a highwire act over an abyss [note *Tightrope Walker [Seiltänzer]*, 1923; plate 20]], as in the wonderfully Chaplinesque film, *Man on Wire*, which Klee, a fan of Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*, would have loved. Disaster awaits every essayed comparison or tentative line of connection between music and visual art, and one winds up sounding like a CD booklet, either so technical that no one understands a word or so schmalzy that they wish they did not. Klee himself said of his efforts to write of visual art and music together, "Yet no amount of analysis will succeed" (*Doch will keine Analyse gelingen*).

Sixth, like everyone else, I have always been struck by Walter Benjamin's response to Klee's well-known *Angelus Novus* of 1920, which Benjamin purchased in 1921 and which he held on to during the various stages of his emigration. Art historians are anxious nowadays to show the extent to which Benjamin's "use" of the painting in his late *Philosophical-Political Fragments* lacks sufficient foundation in the painting itself. I myself have always wondered about the "storm" that blows Benjamin's angel back to the future, the future of continuous human slaughter, a storm that Benjamin says "is blowing from Paradise." Klee was very concerned to show the shadow side of Eden, the very bad weather issuing thence that has plagued us all, and from the beginning. I once gave a paper—in Manhattan—on the storm in Benjamin's text and in Heidegger's rectorship address. That paper upset every

4 Kupper, Paul Klee, 52.

single member of the audience, and I am not going there again.

Seventh, Heidegger's allusion to Klee's well-known *Death and Fire* (*Tod und Feuer*) (1939) in his 1961 lecture, *Time and Being*, invites us to think the two, Heidegger and Klee, together. Klee's art seems to have been made for Heidegger's 1935–36 "The Origin of the Work of Art," with its notions of world and earth in strife. Furthermore, Klee's repeated use of the word *Bewegtheit*, "animatedness" or "movedness," reminds us of the guiding insight of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, which argues that human existence is not automotiv but is moved by time. Klee spurns vulgar, derivative, clock time as much as Heidegger does. In the very year that *Being and Time* was published Klee wrote to Lily Stumpf, "So let the clocks stop. If I had gotten up today by the clock my mind would still be in bed."⁵ Klee's disconcerting aquarelle of 1933, *The Time* (*die Zeit*), 1933 being not just any year in Germany, as Derrida used to remind us constantly, and as a number of sketches in the present exhibition demonstrate (plates 46–54), would be significant both because it reflects a time out of joint and because emblematically it refers to the uncertain hour of our certain death. When I learned that in 1956 Heidegger had contemplated delivering a lecture to a group of architects in Freiburg on the theme of "essentializing the accidental" (*die Verwesentlichung des Zufälligen*), the conjunction of Klee and Heidegger became even more compelling.⁶

Eighth, and finally, one could write an entire essay on the "cool" and the "warm," if not the "hot," in Klee's thermosensitive art. Recall that for him Titian-red and Raphael-rose showed too much of "the warm tendency," whereas Leonardo's achievement depended in part on his "cool tones."⁷ Klee prided himself on his "cool romanticism without pathos" (*kühle Romantik ohne Pathos*).⁸ At the same time, by contrast, who can fail to feel the heat of the reds of *Pandora's Box as Still Life* (*Die Büchse der Pandora als Stilleben*) (1920) and of *Death and Fire*, or of the rich earth colors of the Kairouan aquarelles, or of the sun in *Ad Marginem* (1930), or the extraordinary reds of *Both of Them* (*die Beiden*) (1930; plate 12)? This topic, the cool and the warm, brings me closer to my theme, and it is high time.

After all this indecision, I was inspired by the fact that of the three books Paul Klee illustrated two were among my favorite books of philosophy. First, is Voltaire's *Candide*, with its unfor-



Fig. 2: Paul Klee, *Blue Flower (blaue Blume)*, 1939/55. Watercolor and tempera on primed cotton on plywood, 50 x 51 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern, Livia Klee Donation.

gettable professor, Pangloss, who glides his tongue across all things and so smooths and soothes all the rough edges and pains of the universe—Pangloss, who, as Voltaire writes, "enseigne la métaphysico-théologo-cosmolonigologie" (see *Candide*, Chapter 30, 1912, plate 57). It is as though Voltaire had been reading Heidegger and Derrida. Second, or so the bibliographies and catalogues of Klee's works assured me, is Friedrich von Hardenberg's, alias Novalis's, *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs*, *The Apprentices at Saïs*. The energetic, even frenetic, *Candide* prints have been much discussed, not so the Novalis prints, even though, according to the bibliographies there appeared to be at least fifty-one of them in a text of many fewer pages than that. In spite of their having been listed in the bibliographies and catalogues, however, I eventually discovered that in fact Klee never illustrated any work by Novalis. As Christa Lichtenstern notes laconically, it was the publishers of art books, not Klee himself, who selected a group of Klee's drawings and matched them up, more or less fittingly, with the pages of Novalis's text. Had time allowed, I would have scrambled back to one of my earlier temptations. Yet, pressured by deadlines, but mostly out of love for Novalis, I persisted.

All we really know about Klee's relation to Novalis may be reduced to five points: (1) Klee possessed an edition of Novalis's works, which, however, shows not a single marginal jotting; (2) Klee's letters and diaries contain not a single reference to Novalis; (3) the sole evidence of Klee's having read Novalis derives from Will Grohmann's report that Klee once told him that he had repeatedly read, with the greatest enthusiasm, Novalis's *Hymnen an die Nacht*; (4) the only explicit artistic reference by Klee to Novalis is *Blue Flower (blaue Blume)* (fig. 2) of 1939, which, however, is a reference not to *Die Lehrlinge zu Saïs* but

5 Paul Klee, *Briefe an die Familie: 1893–1940*, ed. Feilz Klee, 2 vols. (Cologne: DuMont, 1979), 2:1059; Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 96.

6 Wolftram Högrebbe, citing Pöggeler, Peetz, and Seubold, discusses Heidegger's unfulfilled plan of 1956. The idea of "essentializing the accidental" derives from a phrase in Klee's "Schöpferische Konfession." See Högrebbe, "Paul Klee im ästhetischen Muster der Moderne," in *Paul Klee in Jena 1924: Der Vortrag*, exh. cat. (Gera: Druckhaus Gera, 1999), 78n12. Högrebbe reflects on the "medial" position of the artist for both Heidegger and Klee, that is, a position neither active nor passive but reminiscent of the middle voice. The artist cannot fabricate the conditions for the success of a work, so that "accident" and "magic," or, thinking with Mallarmé, *un coup de dés*, remain key words for him or her. The *Zu-fall* is in fact what Heidegger calls the sending or granting of time and being—it is *Freigang*. As such, the work of art remains essentially *uncanny*. According to Högrebbe, the first poet-philosopher to be prepared for such a situation of uncanny hovering, hovering in the middle, was Friedrich von Hardenberg (1772–1801), otherwise known as Novalis.

7 Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 26.

8 Giadion-Welcker, *Paul Klee*, 70.

to Heinrich von Ofterdingen [*die blaue Blume sehn' ich mich zu erblicken*]; as to why the blue flower is grape in color, or what that spiky possum or bear-like figure to the left might be, I am in the dark; (5) finally, what I believed to be Klee's prints created for Novalis's text were in fact selected by what Lichtenstern calls "inventive" publishers, first in New York in 1949, some nine years after Klee's death, then later in 1987, forty-seven years after Klee's death, in Zurich and Bern.⁹

My disappointment was tempered only by my anger over the fact that the bibliographies and catalogues insist on listing the Novalis illustrations—in reality, works created by Klee for altogether unrelated occasions—alongside the *Candide* prints. The fact that these editions of Novalis's *Lehrlinge*, both in English and in German, appeared long after Klee's death, along with the glaring absence of Novalis's name in the journals and letters, suggests that Klee in effect had nothing to do with these productions of the *findigen Verleger*.

Yet both disappointment and anger abated when it occurred to me that what most intrigues me about the Klee-Novalis connection is the role of pedagogy for both. Novalis (imaginatively) at Saïs, and Klee (also quite imaginatively, it has to be said) at the Bauhaus. It seems to me that Novalis's *Lehrlinge* is particularly germane, whether or not Klee ever illustrated it. And so, at long last, to begin—after one more obstacle has been cleared.

In his lecture of 1924 "On Modern Art," reprinted in the present catalogue, Klee exhibits his ambivalence toward romanticism. He writes:

Such compelling gestures point with special clarity into the dimension of style. Here romanticism, in its especially crass and bathetic phase, begins to stir.

This gesture wants to repel the Earth utterly, and the next gesture actually elevates itself beyond the Earth. It elevates itself by the dictate of forces that hover, triumphant over the forces of gravity.

In the end I let these forces that are inimical to the Earth soar out into the beyond, until they reach the point of the grand circulation; that way I pass beyond the style of bathos and compulsion to the kind of romanticism that melts into the universe.¹⁰

If Novalis should prove crass and bathetic, if he should repel

the Earth and dream of floating in other atmospheres, triumphant over gravity, then all is lost. Or is he, a mining inspector by profession, quite close to the ground? In what way, then, would he melt into the universe? Where is that point of grand circulation?

In his lecture "Ways of Studying Nature" of 1923, Klee writes: "The dialogue with nature remains the *conditio sine qua non* for the artist. The artist is a human being, partaking of that selfsame nature, and a fragment of nature in the space of nature."¹¹ For Klee, the artwork is not a representation of visible items but a making-visible of the less than visible, perhaps of the *least* visible elements of Creation. Since the Renaissance, argues Klee, the art of painting has refined its optics, but the very emphasis on vision and perspective has caused it to ignore nonoptical impressions and notions. Klee does not break altogether from the visible, except perhaps with his violin, and he spends a great deal of time observing the structure and growth of inorganic things and living beings alike. Like Goethe, he possesses a large collection of stones, plants, and insects; and like Goethe he studies these things with rapt attention. If a naturalist, then a naturalist like Thoreau, intrepid and thorough. A student of Klee's at the Bauhaus, Christof Hertel, reports:

Klee taught us how to see the "articulation" and the "structural relations" of vegetable and animal life. He taught us not merely how to take it in optically, but in his form theory he gave us the principles of structuration [*Gestaltung*] in general. He showed us the grand synthesis that embraces all things, the organic as well as the inorganic. There was nothing he failed to refer to! The same phenomena that we were accustomed to seeing in the realms of the biological and the social realms suddenly became relevant here in their structuration. Everything: zoology, biology, chemistry, physics, astronomy, literature, typography—all these things contributed to his making it clear to us, clear in the literal sense, that everything we are and do stands and is anchored in humanity and in the rhythm of the cosmos.¹²

It is this profound involvement in nature that prevents Klee's art from becoming wholeheartedly "abstract," even if often enough the titles alone of the canvases, drawings, and prints bind the works to world and earth and the "things" of nature. Yet, again, it is less the "things" of nature that fascinate Klee than Delaunay's "rhythms" of natural energies and forces, the cosmic, perhaps even what Heidegger—to whom I have already alluded by speaking of "world and earth"—calls *φύσις*, upsurge into

⁹ See Christa Lichtenstern, "Klee und Beuys im Gespräche mit Novalis," in *Paul Klee trifft Joseph Beuys*, ed. Tilman Osterwold et al., exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2000), 101 and 110n7. I was able to locate, in a distant *Antiquariat*, a copy of the second edition of the Novalis/Klee volume, published that same year, 1987, by Benteli of Bern. In a forward to the book the publisher confesses that the venture "may at first be felt to be overbold" (*mag zunächst als Wagnis empfunden werden*) [5]. The only word I would object to here is *zunächst*, "at first."

¹⁰ Paul Klee, "On Modern Art," (in this volume) 13.

¹¹ Klee, "Wage des Naturstudiums," in *Schriften*, 124; Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 37.
¹² Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 96.

the open and withdrawal into concealment and mystery. These words of philosophical vision are not empty words for one who contemplates the leaves of clover.

There is always something uncanny—unfamiliar, unhomelike—about this upsurge and simultaneous withdrawal, this rhythm of all rhythms. In spite of his wonderful *Cat and Bird* (*Katze und Vogel*) painting of 1928 and his domestic devotion to his roguish cat, Fripouille, the fauna of Klee's canvases tend to be of the more uncanny sort—fish and bugs and microorganisms. Even Franz Marc's monumental and gorgeous blue-flanked horses are too tame for the erstwhile Blue Rider named Klee, and Klee's remarks on Marc in his journal of July–August 1916 betray both regret over Marc's early and violent death and the distance Klee feels from Marc's paintings:

The passionate manner of humankind is missing from my art. I love animals and all creatures, but without that earthly heart's love. I am not drawn to them, nor do I elevate them to me. I release myself into the totality [*Ich löse mich ins Ganze auf*] and stand on brotherly terms with my next-of-kin, with all my earthly neighbors.... Here I am looking for a point more remote, a point closer to the origins of Creation, where I intimate a kind of formula for animal, plant, human being, earth, fire, water, air, and all the forces in circulation [*alle kreisenden Kräfte*] all at the same time.¹³

Anticipations of Novalis occur especially with these references to release into the totality and the search for "a kind of formula," which Novalis called the *lingua romana* and the *logarithm*. The highest and the lowest things in the universe are related logarithmically. Finally, the word *zugleich*, "all at the same time," as we shall see, is an anticipation of Novalis—if Klee may be said to anticipate the work of a man who lived a century prior to him.

Klee's "Creative Credo" brings us closer to the notion of Creation, *Schöpfung*, and therefore closer to the thinking and poeizing of Novalis. For whereas we might readily suppose that Novalis represents that "warm" romanticism which Klee sought to "cool," we should never underestimate Novalis's capacity to descry in nature and Creation the shadowy, the chill, the deleterious and the deathly, about which more in a moment. Meanwhile, from Klee's "Creative Credo":

Art comports itself to Creation by way of simile [*gleichnisartig*]. It is in each case an exemplar, in the way that the earthly is a cosmic exemplar. The emancipation of the elements, their being grouped together in composite subdivisions, our taking them apart and putting them back together again in a whole, working at

the same time on several facets, the pictorial polyphony, the introduction of repose by way of balanced motion—all these are elevated questions of form, determinative for formal wisdom but not yet art in its uppermost sphere. In the uppermost sphere an ultimate mystery stands behind the multiplicity of meanings; here the light of the intellect, lamentably, is snuffed.¹⁴

An anticipation of Novalis occurs especially in the reference to multiplicity of meanings, *Vieldeutigkeit*. One thinks of the endless repetition of the word *mannichfältig*, "manifold," in Novalis's *Lehrlinge zu Sais*. We will also not be surprised to find in this same text that at the highest level of work the intellect is extinguished and something as vague as feeling, *Gefühl*, has to take over.

Perhaps the most striking anticipation of Novalis—if I may continue to speak so anachronistically, as though Klee came first—is Klee's constant emphasis on the craftsmanship or workmanship of the artist. "Think not about form but about forming," he tells his Bauhaus apprentices; think about not the end result, the finished form, but the initial formation. His motto is *Vom Vorbildlichen zum Urbildlichen!*, "From modeled image to primordial image!"¹⁵ Readers of Schelling's *Treatise on Human Freedom* (1809) will recognize the word *Urbild*, derived no doubt from Jacob Böhme and from the emblematic tradition that meant a great deal to Klee. The creative force that drives such primal forming is the imagination itself: the emblematic tradition loves the principal German word for *imagination* especially after Kant, namely, *Einbildungskraft*, "in-forming-force." Such creative force is mysterious, and the clue to the mystery, discussed in Klee's *The Nature of Nature* is the unsettling insight that "there never was a mystery that failed to shatter us from top to bottom."¹⁶ Precisely on account of this desired shattering one must proceed with care, step-by-step, particle-by-particle. One must perform this forming, guided by the hand, and one must persist—*durchhalten!* is Klee's command—one dare not falter: "Do not lose the creative momentum" (*vom schöpferischen Duktus nicht lassen*), commands the teacher.¹⁷ Even if one accepts the warnings of the revisionists, to the effect that Klee reworked his *Tagebücher* and aimed all his essays toward a certain "self-stylization," in which the words *creation*, *cosmos*, *universe* are precisely the main rubrics for the cultivated style, coolly and strategically chosen in order to fabricate "The Klee Universe," the notions themselves, in my view, reflect or radiate a certain heat, a certain warmth, in both artist and artwork—especially in the artist as teacher.

Klee's pedagogy at the Bauhaus from 1921 onward conducts us without fail to Novalis's *Sais*. For the origins of the Bauhaus itself go back to the period of German romanticism. The emphasis on craftsmanship there, especially in Novalis, though later made

14 Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," 122; Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 101.

15 Klee, "On Modern Art," 14.

16 Paul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 2: Unendliche Naturgeschichte*, ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1970), 63; Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 50.

17 *Ibid.*, 67, 50.

13 Paul Klee, *Tagebücher von Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1957), #1008; Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 78.

more famous by Ruskin and Morris of the Arts and Crafts movement, and continuing in Jugendstil and art nouveau, is perhaps the key indication of these origins. Another related indication is the revolutionary change in the theory and practice of pedagogy in the arts and crafts. Recall Klee's account to Lily Stumpf, in a letter dated January 16, 1921, of the first class he witnesses at the Bauhaus, Johannes Itten's extraordinary performance to get his class involved in Matisse's *Dance*.¹⁸ One thinks back to Novalis's *Sais* and ahead to the learning-by-doing methods of Maria Montessori, Jean Piaget, and others. The very notion of apprentices as young learners survives today wherever the Bauhaus has left its mark, whether in Weimar, Dessau, or today's Chicago. For the *Lehr-* of *Lehrlinge* refers to teaching, both in the sense of the material taught and the learning itself; the *Lehr-* of *Lehrling* sounds in our word *learn* rather than in the word *teach*, as though teaching were, as Heidegger once said, *letting learn*, and the *-ling* is a diminutive that suggests youth, incipience. Walter Gropius's July 1919 address to the Bauhaus apprentices sounds like an extended quotation from Novalis's *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais*:

No cumbrous intellectual organizations will come into being, but rather, small, covert, self-contained confederations, lodges, guilds, and secret societies [Verschwörungen] desiring to protect and shape artistically a mystery, a kernel of belief—until from out of these individual groups a universal, grand, sustainable spiritual-religious idea will once again solidify, an idea that will have to find its crystalline expression in a grand collective artwork [Gesamtkunstwerk].... I am visited by the dream that here we should try to gather together into a small community those individuals who exist now in dispersion and utter isolation. If we succeed in this, we will have achieved much.¹⁹

The first two sentences of Novalis's *Lehrlinge zu Sais* sound as though Paul Klee, the artist of *abstrakte Schrift* and *Figurenschrift*, himself could have written them, as though—however virgin his edition—he had long been one of the apprentices and had heard and learned their language:

Human beings tread manifold paths. Whoever pursues and compares these paths will see marvelous figures taking shape, figures that appear to belong to that magnificently ciphered script [*Chifferschrift*] that one espies everywhere—on wings and on eggshells, in clouds, snow, crystals, and rock formations, in bodies of water at the freezing point, in the in-

teriors and on the exteriors of mountain ranges, in plants, animals, and humans, on panes of glass or pitch that we touch and stroke with a fingertip, in iron filings that assemble about a magnet, and in all the peculiar conjunctions of accident.²⁰

Note the temperature of the passage—cooler than one might have expected or remembered it to be. There is something even glacial about it: high mountains, snow, freezing ponds and panes, iron filings—the language perhaps of an inspector of mines, which is what the Hardenbergs were. The figures and ciphers of accident, chance, or contingency in nature, *die sonderbaren Conjunctionen des Zufalls*, are less tepid pink than icy blue. Klee, who loved ciphers, whether numbers or letters, would have loved Novalis's insistence that the key to the code of this marvelous script of nature, this *Wunderschrift*, lies nowhere else than in the figures themselves. For the figures, as he says elsewhere, are engaged in monologue. If the figures are Platonic εἰδη, then they are σωματοειδή,²¹ profiles of embodied things—what Yeats will have called Celtic runes.

Novalis's text, some thirty-two book-pages in length, composed during the years 1798–99, shows two parts. The second and far longer part is called "Nature," while the first, only four pages long, is called "The Apprentice," in the singular, *Der Lehrling*. This follows an early plan for the text,²² which has this singular *Lehrling* as the title of the entire proposed piece. Presumably, one of the apprentices is writing to and for himself an account of the teaching he has been receiving, reporting for example how the teacher in his youth "collected stones, flowers, beetles of all kinds and lined them up in rows of manifold sorts."²³ His teacher, affirms the apprentice, saw the interconnections among things because he "heard, saw, touched, and thought at the same time."²⁴ Here is one of those instants of the *zugleich* that Novalis and Klee share.²⁵ The apprentice emphasizes, however, that the teacher does not wish to shape his apprentices in his own likeness, nor does he expect one apprentice to be like another, either in terms of their particular interests or the pace of their learning. He does not line them up in rows. Each apprentice travels paths "through new lands,"²⁶ each is a "Novalis," since this pseudonym means "discoverer of new lands."

According to Schiller's poem, "Das verschleierte Bild zu Sais," and to all the lore surrounding the goddess Isis at Sais, no mortal dare lift her veil and confront her face to face. Thus we have to try to become immortal, says the apprentice; we have to try never to stop seeing and sensing. For anyone who for reasons of false piety or prudery refuses even to try to lift that veil "is no

20 Novalis, *Werke, Tagebücher und Briefe Friedrich von Hardenbergs*, ed. Hans-Joachim Mühl and Richard Samuel, 3 vols. (Munich: Carl Hanser, 1978), 1:201.

21 Plato, *Phaedo* 83d, 86a.

22 Novalis, *Werke*, 1:234.

23 *Ibid.*, 1:202.

24 *Ibid.*

25 See, for example, *Group in Motion (bewegte Gruppe)* (1930; plate 24).

26 Novalis, *Werke*, 1:204.

18 Klee, *Briefe*, 2:170–71; Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 90–92.

19 Kupper, *Paul Klee*, 86.

proper apprentice at Sais.²⁷

The second part of Novalis's *Lehrlinge*, entitled "Nature," is marked by a wide range of voices, often in dispute, that speak of the study of nature. The opening voice affirms the importance of craftsmanship, of the workshop and its tools, *Werkzeuge*, for study of the origin and history of the universe. One thinks of the craftsman-father of the universe, the *Demiourgos* of Plato's *Timaeus*, but also, at the other end of the history of metaphysics, of Heidegger's 1927 lecture course, which analyzes at great length the production model of metaphysics.²⁸ Novalis's plans for *Der Lehrling* and the text itself emphasize the workshop or studio as the site of nature study—it is almost as though, to repeat, Novalis were citing Gropius or Klee, rather than the other way around. Novalis, himself a geologist and chemist, a mine inspector by inherited profession, respects experimentation and intervention. He is especially drawn to questions of oxidation and combustion, intrigued by the fact that oxygen, essential to life, is ultimately destructive of it: we breathe and burn, or, in the end, get rusty. Little wonder that Novalis's "tones" are less warm than one might expect. To alter the figure, Novalis can fly high and sing with the all the birds of metaphor, but by profession and inclination he must also wriggle his way into the Earth's interior. He knows chill. He knows gray. He knows the dark. Pathology and nosology are among the preferred studies of his planned encyclopedia, *The Universal Sketchbook*. Yet he knows also how to combine the darker colors so that they too have an irresistible allure. Novalis's contemporary, Hölderlin, translates the name Persephone as *zornigmitleidig—ein Licht*, "furiously compassionate—a bright light." Novalis, for his part, has the first voice of his "Nature" say concerning the mysteries of the underworld, "and who knows into what heavenly mysteries she will then initiate him, she who dwells in the subterranean realm."²⁹

However, a nay-saying voice now takes over. Nature is horrifically wasteful, "a frightful mill of death."³⁰ Human reason should therefore not even try to plumb the depths of nature, for extravagant and violent nature is a lure and a trap for humankind, which has a higher spiritual destiny. Nature has the power to devour us, and the marvels it shows us are but crumbs fallen from the table of an ogre, a Titan, a Cronos.

Ah, but we can overpower nature with cunning, counters a bolder, more Faustian voice. We can subdue it, or her, make her our slave. We are the free ones, the sovereign ones, and we will shackle her with our sciences and engineering and bend her to our tasks. One can almost hear this voice—in our time, not in Novalis's—announcing confidently, "If she vomits forth oil in an inconvenient place, we'll stuff golf balls and rubber tires down her throat, and thus, surely, we shall prevail."

A less aggressive voice intervenes, but it maintains the emphasis on human freedom and on the centeredness humanity gained by the Copernican revolution in science: we possess, we are,

the key to nature. She cannot lock the door and hide forever. A dour old man interrupts now, in order to complete the thought; he may hail from Königsberg, far to the cloudy north. He urges the apprentices to be chary of their appetites and to study above all things the narrow ways of interiority, ethicality, and practical reason.

The apprentice, caught in the crossfire of all these voices, is by now in heady confusion. He is rescued, not by some logical calculus, but by a playful fellow apprentice who rushes onto the scene with garlands of roses in his hair, as though his teacher were Alcibiades. "Best to be attuned everywhere!" (*Das Beste ist überall die Stimmung!*) he cries. And in nature mood or attunement is a matter of love and longing. What our confused apprentice needs is "a first kiss."³¹ The playful faun is in fact quoting a fragment of Novalis from 1798 that reads, "The first kiss...is the principle of philosophy—the origin of a new world—the beginning of absolute time-reckoning—the completion of an infinitely waxing bond with the self. Who would not be pleased with a philosophy whose germ is a first kiss?"³² The garlanded playmate recounts to the apprentice the fairy tale of Hyacinth and Rosebud, more an allegory than a fairy tale, and very much an allegory concerning the veil. To make a long tale short, Hyacinth, an overly studious youth, leaves his parents and his darling Rosebud to go off in search of the goddess Isis at Sais. He would lift her veil and gaze on the features that express all knowledge. After countless tribulations he reaches the sacred city on the western Nile delta, where he discovers that the Mother of All Things, the Veiled Virgin of the temple, is in fact—his darling Rosebud. Now, that's *Stimmung*, and one can find it everywhere, even at home. Presumably, Hyacinth thereupon receives from Rosebud his osculatory introduction to philosophy, and, together, they make lots of babies, since, as the final line of the fairy tale says, "Back then people could have as many children as they wanted."³³

The two apprentices embrace and leave the lecture hall, which the disputants have long since quit, and silence now reigns. Suddenly all the objects in the collections there—stones, plants, and bugs, all the "myriad natures"—begin to murmur among themselves. They lament their separation from nature's bosom, for they were abruptly torn away from her. And they express a certain amount of skepticism: "If only human beings could understand the inner music of nature and had a sense for the outer harmony.... Will they never learn to feel?... Thinking is but a dream of feeling, a moribund feeling, a pallid gray, enfeebled life."³⁴

The scene shifts now to the broad steps of the temple portico and gardens. Travelers have arrived, pilgrims in search of Isis. Their voices are more harmonious than those of the disputants, and, as you will hear, Paul Klee speaks with more than one of these voices. The first pilgrim speaks of the undivided attention to detail that the student of nature must possess. If such undivided attention is there,

27 Ibid.

28 Martin Heidegger, *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1975).

29 Novalis, *Werke*, 1:209–210.

30 Ibid., 1:210–11.

31 Ibid., 1:214.

32 Ibid., 2:330.

33 Ibid., 1:218.

34 Ibid., 1:218–19.

Thoughts soon originate, thoughts or new kinds of perceptions, which appear to be nothing other than gentle motions of a coloring crayon or a pencil rattling away [*zarte Bewegungen eines färbenden oder klappern-den Stifts*—you will think I am quoting Klee here, but it is Novalis, I swear it], or wondrous contractions or figurations in a viscous liquid, which, in a marvelous way, are in him. They spread from that point where he made his first impression [*von dem Punkte, wo er den Eindruck fest stach*], expanding to all sides with lively animation, and they abscond with his ego [*und nehmen sein Ich mit fort*].³⁵

This amazing first traveler or pilgrim continues with a reflection on the human body that would have delighted Maurice Merleau-Ponty, who loved Klee's art,³⁶ and would have delighted Klee too, I believe. The pilgrim says,

Nature stands in an immediate relation to the members [*Gliedmaßen*] of our body, the members we call the senses. Unknown and mysterious relationships of our body enable us to surmise unknown and mysterious relations in nature, so that nature is that wonderful community into which our body introduces us.... One can readily see that these inner relations and arrangements of our body must be researched above all other things.... The thought also strikes us, however, that we must have already had manifold experiences in thinking before we try to understand the intrinsic nexus of our body.³⁷

A second pilgrim now injects the theme of *time* into the conversation, if only because the phrase associated with the veiled goddess at Saïs is said to be, "I am what was, is, and shall be." This traveler invokes the magnificent simultaneity of nature, *das große Zugleich in der Natur*.³⁸ Leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruit are present, past, and future at once, as Goethe demonstrated in his *Metamorphosis of Plants*. The second pilgrim uses Hölderlin's favorite word for this simultaneity, namely, *die Allgegenwart*, "the omnipresent," "ubiquity."

An irrepressible young poet speaks up. His theme is love, lust, and liquid. Water, molten metals, and thinly veiled (or boldly unveiled) sexual secretions are his gods and goddesses. The union of sky and sea, of fire and water, is the object of love's

alchemy, he says. No one will be able to grasp nature, he continues,

Who has no organ for nature, no inner implement [*Werkzeug*] for reproducing and isolating nature...and who fails to mingle with all natural creatures, feeling his way into them, as it were, possessing an innate passion for reproduction [*mit angeborner Zeugungslust*], with an intense, manifold affinity for all bodies, through the medium of receptivity [*Empfindung*].

The poet's goal is to forge a chain of voluptuousness, *Wollust*. Luckily, the dour old moralist is well out of hearing range.

The teacher is the last to speak. As evening falls the travelers ask him what it means to be a teacher at Saïs. What qualities must the teacher have? His reply is sober and far from picturesque. What is needed from youth on, he says, is relentless discipline for study, along with solitude and taciturnity, *Einsamkeit* and *Stillschweigen*. He or she must allow the apprentices to develop independently and at their own pace. Once again the practical, craftsman-like training is stressed:

In the workshops of craftsmen and artists, and there where human beings are in multiple ways engaged in and struggling with nature [*in vielfältigem Umgang und Streit*], and that means with farmers, mariners, cattle raisers, ore miners, and many other trades—this is where the development of the sense [for nature] takes place most readily and most often.³⁹

And what does he or she teach them? Principally, how to choose the right materials for the goals the apprentices have set for themselves. Furthermore, the teacher must select that wide range of crafts- and trades-folk with whom the apprentices will work. The goal? That this vast range of experience in working with nature will become common property. This is what makes a teacher at Saïs something more than a naturalist or a contingent enthusiast of nature. And with that Novalis's text closes.

One may well wish to continue the tradition initiated by Max Huggler, searching among Novalis's thousands of scientific and philosophical fragments for material that would have, *must* have, gripped Klee.⁴⁰ That Klee's own edition of Novalis shows no marginal jottings and quite possibly contains only a fraction of the material available to us today, restrains neither Huggler nor

³⁵ Ibid., 1:220.

³⁶ Recall, in Merleau-Ponty's *L'œil et l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) the key role played by Klee in the fourth chapter, which is devoted to the mysterious presence of the invisible in the visible. This would have been the *ninth* topic on which I would have wanted to work, and perhaps it would have been the very best fruit of my indecision.

³⁷ Novalis, *Werke*, 1:220–21.

³⁸ Ibid., 1:225.

³⁹ Ibid., 1:232.

⁴⁰ Max Huggler, *Paul Klee: Die Malerei als Blick in den Kosmos* (Frauenfeld und Stuttgart: Huber, 1969), 239–42.

those who follow in his footsteps, and I feel no compunction to restrain myself. The truth is that so many expressions in Klee's essays, letters, and diaries are reminiscent of Novalis's scientific and philosophical fragments that their relation seems uncannily close.

My own selection, no doubt as speculative as any other, involves five areas of close proximity between Novalis and Klee: (1) the mix of natural science and poesy, the mathematical and the metaphorical, the empirical and the transcendental, in both Klee's statements on art and pedagogy and in the romanticism of Novalis—for such a mix is precisely what Novalis calls the *lingua romana*; (2) the fascination of both for signs, hieroglyphs, ciphers, and images; (3) their focus on the procession of point, line, plane, pyramid, and sphere; (4) the attention by both to what others deride as "mere" accident or contingency, *des Zufälligen*; (5) the attraction for both of childlike forms—fable and fairy tale, dream life, and what Novalis calls "theory of voluptuousity."

With regard to the first, the *mélange* of natural science and artistic creativity, consider the following from Novalis's 1798 *Vararbeiten*, in which the usual sense of "romantic" is altered:

The world must be romanticized. In this way one will find its original meaning once again. Romanticizing is nothing other than a qualitative raising to the powers [Potenzirung]. The lower self is identified with a better self in this operation. Thus we ourselves are a kind of qualitative sequence of powers. This operation is still altogether unknown. Whenever I give the common a higher meaning, the usual a mysterious aspect, the familiar the dignity of the unknown, the finite an infinite appearance, in this way I romanticize it—Opposed to that is the operation for the higher, unknown, mystical, infinite—by connecting these matters we find their logarithms—They receive a customary expression. Romantic philosophy. *Lingua romana*. Alternate elevation and degradation.⁴¹

The reference to logarithms suggests Novalis's pervasive fascination with the mathematical. In his early *Fichte-Studien* he writes: "I must discover for myself the elements of mathematical science."⁴² Much later, in the third set of holograph notes for *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, we read: "Geometry is the transcendental art of signs [Zeichenkunst]—sculpture. Mechanics—transcendental acoustics, etc."⁴³ In the final set of holograph notes he writes: "Life is something like colors, tones, and force. The romantic studies life in the way the painter, musician, and mechanic study color, tone, and force. A painstaking study of life is what makes the romantic, just as the painstaking study of color, figuration,

tone, and force makes the painter, musician, and mechanic."⁴⁴

As for the second theme, sign and image, consider the following fragments. Early in the *Fichte-Studien* Novalis writes, "A closer explanation of the image. / Sign / Theory of signs.... Theory of space and time in the image."⁴⁵ "The I has a hieroglyphic force."⁴⁶ "The intuited concept is a sign."⁴⁷ The fascination with letters and numbers—with semiotic systems of all kinds, reminiscent of C. S. Peirce and later structuralist thinkers and linguists—pervades the notebooks from start to finish.

With regard to point, line, and plane, so central to Klee's thinking, consider the following fragments. "The I, with its members of form and matter, is the point of empirical consciousness; the pyramid, rising up, is the transcendental. Actually, we always remain standing in the point.... This point is everywhere in us—everywhere where thesis, antithesis and synthesis are, that is, where we ourselves are."⁴⁸ "Thesis and antithesis are the endpoints of the line. The line is synthesis."⁴⁹ And this:

We seek the projection that suits the world—we ourselves are this projection. What are we? personified omnipotent points. However, the execution, as an image of the projection, must also be equal to the projection in its free activity and self-relation, and vice versa. Life, or the essence of spirit, thus consists in the engendering bearing and rearing of one's like. Thus, only to the extent that a human being engages in a happy marriage with itself, constituting a loving family, is it at all capable of marriage and family. Act of self-embrace....

Love popularizes the personality. It makes individualities communicable and comprehensible. (Amorous understanding.)⁵⁰

Concerning the fourth area, the contingent or accidental, discussed in detail by Wolfram Högbe, consider the following fragments. For Novalis, accident is both catastrophe and happy circumstance—captured in the first place in the figure of Sophie, his fiancée, who stands for both the gift of love and the disaster of an early death. "Equanimity—even in the face of the most hopeless accidents. For example, with Sophie."⁵¹ "One does not know what one is wishing for when one wants to fix the accidental—on the theme of love. / One must let the accidental be accidental."⁵² "Whenever I believe that little Sophie is around me, and can appear, and if I act in accord with this belief, then she is indeed around me—and in the end she will surely appear—precisely

44 *Ibid.*, 2:708.

45 *Ibid.*, 2:10.

46 *Ibid.*, 2:12.

47 *Ibid.*, 2:76.

48 *Ibid.*, 2:41.

49 *Ibid.*, 2:69.

50 *Vararbeiten* (1798) in *ibid.*, 2:329–30.

51 *Ibid.*, 2:142.

52 *Ibid.*, 2:159.

41 Novalis, *Werke*, 2:334.

42 *Ibid.*, 2:46.

43 *Ibid.*, 2:673.

there where I do not surmise it—In me, as my soul perhaps, etc.”⁵³ Finally, contingency is what makes every philosophical system unsystematic and unsystematizable:

The properly philosophical system must be freedom and infinity—or, to express it in a poignant fashion, systemlessness—brought together in a system. Only that kind of system can avoid the mistakes of the system, in such a way that neither *injustice* nor anarchy can be held against it. The universal system of philosophy must, like time, be one thread along which one can run through infinite determinations—It must be a system of the most manifold unity, of infinite expansion, with the compass of freedom—neither a formal nor a material system—We must search out the dichotomy everywhere.⁵⁴

The pedagogical corollary to this is the maxim, embraced by Klee and Novalis alike, “Practice slowness,” *Übe dich in der Langsamkeit*.⁵⁵

To present Novalis’s fragments on fable, fairy tale, and dream would double the length of this essay, already too long. Let two passages suffice: “A fairy tale is actually like a dream image—without context—An ensemble of wondrous things and events—for example, a *musical fancy*—the harmonious consequences of an Aeolus harp—*nature itself*.”⁵⁶ With regard to fancy and fantasy: “If we had a Fantastic as we have a Logic, then the art of invention would have been—invented.”⁵⁷

At the outset I referred to Klee’s astonishing productivity during his final years, the years of his illness. Not long before Novalis died—of tuberculosis, a month short of his twenty-ninth birthday—he jotted down a list of things he might do were he to become ill. Perhaps the following fragment more than any other shows how close Novalis and Klee might have been.

If I were to become ill, then the order of the day would be: edifying texts, novels, etc.—chemical experiments, drawing—making music, guitar—copying or excerpting passages—cooking, arranging tables—visiting craftsmen—working a lathe, carving, etc.—arranging cabinets—observing the illness—acoustical experiments—description of fossils—observing the weather, etc.—visits—motion—rest—gymnastics—and (as with learning languages) *patience*.⁵⁸

Yet if I have brought readers all this way to Saïs, on the west-

ern delta of the Nile, and all the way back a millennium or three, but have not given them a chance to lift the veil of the goddess, that we all may see her face to face, for shame! Where will we find her? In dozens of sketches and paintings no doubt, and in various guises. In the present exhibition, examine Klee’s *Printed Sheet with Pictures (Bilderbogen)* (1937; plate 36), which seems to offer us the goddess together with an apprentice at Saïs, an apprentice who stands in fear and trembling, googily-eyed before her. ■

53 *Ibid.*, 2:611.

54 *Ibid.*, 2:200–201.

55 *Ibid.*, 2:143.

56 *Ibid.*, 2:696.

57 *Ibid.*, 2:697.

58 *Ibid.*, 2:677–78.

Dennis J. Schmidt

Paul Klee and the Writing of Life

Human beings take many paths. If one follows and compares them, one sees strange figures emerge; figures which seem to belong to that great cipher one can find written everywhere, in wings, eggshells, in clouds, in the snow, in crystals and in rock formations, upon frozen waters, on the inside and outside of mountains, of plants, of animals, of human beings, in the lights of heaven, on the scratched slivers of pitch and glass, in the iron filings gathered around the magnet, and in the peculiar conjunctions of chance. In these one intuits the key to this magic writing, even a grammar, however this intuition will not let itself be brought into a fixed form and it seems unwilling to become a higher key.

—Novalis¹

Life has long been identified as a matter of movement; more precisely, life is recognized as that which has the source of movement in itself. Already we find Aristotle describing the “movement of life” (κίνησις τοῦ βίου) as one way of characterizing that which philosophy needs to understand.² In this task of thinking life, philosophers have long and almost universally subscribed to the view that the most appropriate response to this task—our best means of giving voice and expression to life—is found in language. Philosophy lives in, and is oriented by, the λόγος, by the word. Hegel gives expression to this philosophical commitment to the word in blunt and unhesitating form when he says, “what is called the unutterable is nothing other than the untrue.”³ In other words, all that remains apart from language lacks the dignity of truth and so loses the right to make a claim upon thinking.

But this hegemony of the word in thinking the truth of the being of life has always had significant, even if largely unquestioned, collateral consequences. Among these is a severe critique of the capacity of the image to show anything true about the movement of life. Measured against the word, the image falls short and what it most fails to show is the very key to understanding life—its movement. Plato makes this point clear in a passage that so sharply condemns the capacity of the image that he even includes the written word—language that rests upon its translation into a sort of image—in his critique. Plato writes—though in a writing that seeks to undermine its own written character by miming speech—the following: “Writing [ἴγραφή]...has this strange quality, and is very much like painting [ζωγραφία]; for the creatures of painting stand there like living beings [ζῶντα], but if one asks them a question, they preserve a solemn silence. And so it is with written words; you might think they spoke as if they have intelligence [φρονούντας], but if you question them...

1 Novalis [Friedrich von Hardenberg], *Die Lehrlinge zu Sais, in Schriften*, ed. P. Kluckhohn and R. Samuel, vol. 1 (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1922), 79.

2 Although the questions of “life” and of “nature” cannot be made equivalent, all deep kinships notwithstanding, it needs to be noted that the same identification of nature, of physis with movement, is decisive. Here, once again, Aristotle is instructive (see his *Physics* 2.1).

3 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt: Meiner, 1952), 88.

they always stand still and say only one and the same thing."⁴ In other passages Plato will be even more forceful in his condemnation: writing will be described as "the corpse of a thought" and painting will be characterized as φαντασματα—phantasms, not reality.⁵

It is no accident that in the long history of philosophy the image—above all the image that calls attention to itself as an image, namely, the image in painting—has largely been ignored. When it is indeed considered by philosophers, painting is invariably relegated to the margins of what matters, to that philosophical ghetto called "aesthetics." As a consequence, the very real questions that belong to the effort to think the movement of life, questions about the reach of words and of images to that end, are effaced.

There are, of course, exceptions to this rule and there is a tradition in which these questions are discussed, but until Lessing's *Laocoön* (1766) those discussions remained quite marginal in the history of philosophy.⁶ The most pronounced and important of those exceptions begins with Kant and develops with increasing intensity up through Nietzsche, eventually even coming to define a tradition of contemporary philosophy. Here I am referring to the notion of a *Bildungstrieb* or *Kunsttrieb*, that is the notion that life itself, indeed the very movement of life, is most of all dedicated to giving expression to itself, to leaving traces in the world, to inscribing itself wherever it appears. In this tradition a new dignity is granted to works of art and images are found to hold profound, even if inexpressible, possibilities. Even dreams and doodles become worthy of attention, while painting is gradually recognized as a highly reflected and reflective form of expression that cannot be dismissed or neglected. Much could be said about this philosophic tradition, but one interesting and quite telling common denominator defining that tradition is how consistently those working in it in the last one hundred years have turned to Paul Klee's work—both his written work and his paintings—in order to find some way of understanding and of seeing just how the image can disclose something of the being of life.⁶ Adorno, Benjamin, Bataille, Heidegger, Gadamer, Foucault,

Lyotard, Merleau-Ponty, and Deleuze are just a few of those who have found a resource and inspiration in Klee's work. There seem to be twin reasons for this deep attraction to Klee's work: first, one finds—in both his writings and his images—a profound investigation of the relation of words and images, an interrogation of their relation and respective possibilities that outstrips so much of what can be found on this question in the history of philosophy; second—and again, in both Klee's writings and his images—one finds an uncommon sensitivity to the effort to carry forward, not simply to copy or represent, the real movement of life.

In 1924, Klee gave a lecture entitled "On Modern Art" to commemorate the opening of an exhibition of his works in Jena. Klee's lecture begins by speaking about the limitations he faces by the fact of having to speak of painting at all, above all to speak of, and even in front of, his own paintings. He commences by remarking upon the classical philosophical problem of the relation of word and image, and ends the lecture by calling attention to the relation of painting to the movement of life. In short, Klee's lecture, which is dedicated to asking what it is that we are to see in his paintings, stands as a real counter, a real reply, to the long history of the philosophical dismissal of painting. He begins:

If, in such proximity to my works, which really should speak their own independent language, I still seek words, then I feel a little bit anxious about whether there are sufficient reasons to do this and about whether I will do it in the right way.

For, as much as I feel certain that—as a painter—I possess the means of moving others in the direction that I am driven, I am just as certain that I feel that the word is not given to me to point out those paths.⁷

This comment is not a platitude that says simply paintings should "speak" for themselves. It is rather an expression of a sort of doubled truth, a double bind, namely the deep and ineluctable sense of the *need* or the *summons* of language that belongs to the image that is simultaneous with the *absence* of the word. Klee is acutely aware of the riddle harbored in the question of the relation between word and image. Far from setting it aside as has so often been done in the history of philosophy, Klee's

4 Plato, *Phaedrus* 276d. It is worth noting that the Greek word for "painting"—*ὑγραγραφαί*—really refers to the "writing" (*ὑγραφή*) of "life" (*ζῆν*). This recognition that painting is to be understood as a kind of writing is crucial to understanding the Greek conception of painting and it is equally what separates that understanding from subsequent conceptions of painting. In contrast to this view of painting as writing, we refer to these works of art by making reference to the material out of which they are composed: paint.

5 For the most part this tradition tends to the view that there is a fundamental sameness to the word and the image so that Horace's comment "ut pictura poesis" ("as for painting, so too poetry") has the status of something of a truism. This tradition also finds expression in the notion of *ekphrosis*, that is the assumption that images "speak." Lessing's analysis of this idea of *ekphrosis* in his treatment of Homer's presentation of Achilles's shield in Book Eighteen of the *Iliad* changes the tide of this tradition and begins the process whereby the depth of these issues is finally broached. On this, see my "Like a fire that consumes all before it," in *Lyrical and Ethical Subjects* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 141–62.

6 Stephen H. Watson's book, *Crescent Moon over the Rational: Philosophical Interpretations of Paul Klee* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009) traces the details of this tradition carefully and insightfully. See also my *Between Word and Image: Heidegger, Gadamer, and Klee on Gesture and Genesis* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).

7 Paul Klee, "Vortrag Jeno" [facsimile reproduction], in *Paul Klee in Jeno 1924: Der Vortrag*, exh. cat. (Gero: Druckhaus Gero, 1999), 49 (my translation of this work throughout). This text would not be published until 1945, with the lecture thenceforth titled "Über die moderne Kunst." Most of Klee's writings were not published until after the war, so the impact of his theoretical work would not be felt until after his painting had already established him as making original contributions to long-standing philosophical problems. The one significant exception to this delayed publication is his essay "Schöpferische Konfession," which was published in 1920 in conjunction with a quite prominent series of texts entitled *Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit*.

works—both written and pictorial—frequently present this enigma of the relation of the word and the image. One way in which he does this is in the way words enter into his painting. There are two ways in which this clearly happens. First, there are paintings in which words or letters constitute the image. Second, the title itself is presented as a part of the painting; for Klee, the words of the title are never supplemental to the work, but intrinsic to it, so much so that he said that he did not consider a painting to be complete until it had gone through the “baptism of the title.” In such instances one sees that there is for Klee a sort of double life of the word and the image, each crosses into the other even while remaining itself. So, for instance, the eyes of the person in *To Make Visible* (*sichtbar machen*) (1926; plate 59) repeat the letter *s* in the word “sichtbar.” One sees this incorporation of words in many paintings; among the best-known instances of this is Klee’s late painting *Death and Fire* (*Tod und Feuer*) (1940; fig. 1) in which the *T*, *O*, and *D* constitute features of the image.⁸ One soon comes to realize that the opening words of this lecture in 1924 call attention to a very real question about the relation of words and images driving Klee’s work. One can argue, rightly I believe, that Klee’s reflections on this question go far beyond what one finds on this matter in the history of philosophy.

Later in his lecture, Klee will make more precise the difficulty of speaking about paintings. This is the point at which Klee surpasses most philosophical discussions of this issue; it is also the point at which he begins to link the question of word and image to the task of thinking the movement of life:

It is not easy to find one’s way in a whole that is composed of parts which belong to different dimensions. And nature is just such a whole, as is its transformed copy [*Abbild*] art.

It is difficult to survey such a totality—whether it is nature or art—and it is even more difficult to help another find such a comprehensive view.

This is due to the temporally distinct methods, which are the only ones available to us, for conveying a clear spatial image [*Gebilde*], in such a form of representation [*Vorstellung*]. The reason for this is the deficiency of the temporal character of language.

With such a means we lack the ability to discuss a multi-dimensional simultaneity in a synthetic manner.

Despite all of these deficiencies we must con-



Fig. 1: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Death and Fire* (*Tod und Feuer*), 1940/332. Oil and colored paste on burlap, 46.7 x 44.6 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

cern ourselves with the parts in their detail....

That which the so-called spatial arts have long achieved, that which even the temporal art of music has achieved with its resounding precision in polyphony, this phenomenon of a simultaneous multi-dimensionality which helps drama reach its climax, is something that we unfortunately cannot find in the realm of linguistic didactical expression. Contact with these dimensions must, in this case, take place externally, after the fact.⁹

In short, the complexity of the image, which emerges out of its “multi-dimensional simultaneity,” outstrips the capacities of language that are wedded to a sequential consequentality. In making this comparison between words and images, Klee will echo Lessing who spoke of the same compression of painting and the same extension of the narrative as well. Lessing, like Klee, sees in this the heart of the irreconcilable issues that bind words and images. But Lessing, unlike Klee, finds in this same difference the “advantage” of language. Lessing is clear: “And what are these advantages? The liberty to extend his description over that which preceded and that which followed the single moment represented in the painting; and the power of showing not only what the artist shows, but also that which the artist must leave to the imagination.”¹⁰ In other words, Lessing—and in this he is quite

⁸ One thinks here as well of a painter like Cy Twombly for whom words can constitute the entire image. Like Klee before him, Twombly’s work is deeply inspired by, and dedicated to, the question of the relation of words and images. So, for instance, one can approach Twombly’s ten painting cycle “50 Days at Ilum” as a painterly rejoinder to Lessing’s *Laocoön*. On this, see my “Like a fire that consumes all before it,” 141–62.

⁹ Klee, “Vortrag Jena,” 52–53.

¹⁰ Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laocoön* (Stuttgart, 1766), 99.

representative of a long-standing philosophical prejudice regarding painting—understands painting as riveted to, and thus limited by, the moment; whereas language stretches itself across time. In short, the verb always trumps the image. But in his essay “Creative Credo” (1918) Klee makes his opposition to this view quite clear: “Movement is the source of all growth. In Lessing’s *Laocoön*, the subject of so much mental exercise in our younger years, there is much ado about the difference between time and space in art. Once we examine it more closely, this is really just a bit of erudite hair-splitting for space too implies the concept of time...the work of art is the record of such movement.”¹¹ Klee’s remark takes the traditional distinction between word and image—the temporal difference between them—and turns the evaluation of that distinction on its head. His emphasis on the temporality of the work will point to one of the keys of his own understanding of painting; namely, that the painting needs to be seen as a movement, not at all as static, not frozen in the moment.¹² Klee understands the painting as the product of a dynamic activity and, insofar as it succeeds, the painting remains a dynamic work. There are many ways in which Klee’s paintings exhibit this dynamic quality. In his lecture he refers to what he calls the simultaneity of forms or the “multi-dimensionality” of painting which is found in layering, overlapping forms, depth, perspective, and other techniques (one sees this in almost all of Klee’s paintings, but see plates 11, 15, 20, 26, 29, 45, 61 for a diverse set of examples). This palimpsest-like character of Klee’s work is not to be explained simply as a spatial overwriting of images; rather, it is one way that a painting simultaneously presents a happening of events that are different. This overwriting of images is, at bottom, a temporal matter. There are other ways in which this movement at the heart of painting is presented in Klee’s work. One sees this, for instance, in his frequent use of arrows or other symbols for movement (see plates 4, 18, 27, 37). But this movement, whether or not it is explicitly depicted as such, belongs to the essence of all painting for Klee. It belongs in the relations between colors, shapes, lines, as well as the manner in which the painting comes to be. To see the painting is to see the movement of life that courses through it.

In his lecture we find another way in which Klee makes an effort to unfold the movement defining the painting. He does this when he alludes to a kinship between the “spatial art” of painting and the “temporal art” of music. Understanding this inherent proximity uniting music and painting moves to the heart of Klee’s understanding of painting and to how it is that we are to see his paintings as a matter of movement. It is not insignificant that Klee was a quite accomplished musician (a violinist) and was always surrounded by musicians (his father was a music teacher, his mother a trained singer, and his wife a pianist). References to music show up in Klee’s paintings in a variety of ways, among

them are the titles that so frequently refer to musical performance or elements of music (see, for instance, plates 37–40). One sees allusions to music as well in his lecture notes from the Bauhaus, in which Klee “scores” his thoughts on composition. Klee often spoke and wrote of “polyphonic painting” as a way of clarifying the simultaneity that can define painting. In a 1917 diary entry he writes, “Simple movement seems banal to us. The element of time [as sequence] must be eliminated. Yesterday and tomorrow as simultaneous. In music, polyphony helped to some extent to satisfy this need.... Polyphonic painting is superior to music in that in it the time element becomes a spatial element. The notion of simultaneity stands out even more richly.”¹³ This bond between painting and music for Klee is fundamental and calls to mind Nietzsche’s remark that music gives birth to painting by giving off “sparks of images.”¹⁴ Klee would, I believe, agree, but would also add that painting, in a like fashion, must be understood as giving birth to music. But it is not the subject matter or the titles of Klee’s paintings that serve as the real link between painting and music for him. It is rather in the form, the movement one sees in the painting, that this temporal link is most deeply expressed.¹⁵

In his lecture Klee gives two reasons for this liveliness, this movement that defines the heart of painting. The first reason has already been noted: the simultaneity of forms or what Klee calls the “multi-dimensionality” of painting. The second account that he gives of this temporality of painting is more complicated and goes to the core of what he says in his lecture. To make this clear, Klee’s text itself needs to be cited in more detail. At the outset of the lecture, Klee compares the artist and the tree. The image he describes opens a new and important perspective on the frequent images of trees and plants—of vegetative life—that one finds in Klee’s paintings (see, for instance, plates 2, 9, 11, 37):

I want to compare this many-rooted and many-branched order [of the things of nature and of life] to the rootwork of the tree.

The sap flows to the artist from the root, flowing through him and through his eye.

In this sense, he stands in the place of the trunk.

Pressured and moved by the power of this flow, he leads his vision further on, into the work.

Just as the crown of the tree unfolds itself temporally and spatially, becoming visible on all

11 Cited in Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1955), 98–99.

12 Here a text that deserves serious attention should be noted: Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s *Notes de cours, 1959–1961*, ed. Stéphanie Ménasé (Paris: Gallimard, 1996) is remarkable for its efforts to unfold the nature of painting in terms of movement. See especially pages 55–64 which are largely devoted to a discussion of Klee. Also notable in this volume are the pages devoted to Heidegger (94–148).

13 Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), #1081.

14 See, among other places, *Die Geburt der Tragödie, in Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe Vol. 3.1*, ed. Giorgio Colli and Mazzino Montinari (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1972), 49.

15 For an extended discussion of music in Klee’s work, see Hajo Düchting, *Paul Klee: Painting Music* (Munich: Prestel, 2004).

sides, so too with the work.

It would never occur to anyone to demand that the crown of the tree should grow in the image of its root. Everyone understands that there cannot be an exact mirroring relation between above and below. It is clear that the different functions of different elemental realms must produce lively divergences...

In the work of art, which has been compared to the crown of the tree, there is a necessary deformation by virtue of entering into the specific dimensions of the pictorial. For in this we find the *rebirth of nature*.¹⁶

Klee's point is that art should not be understood as copying or representing nature; rather, if there is a sense in which art "copies" or "repeats" nature, then it is in this parallel between the coming-to-be of the painting and the life of nature as it is witnessed in the growth of the tree that is rooted in the earth and reaches to the heavens.¹⁷ The movement of life that pulses through the tree is the same movement that defines the successful work of art. Both movements bring into being something new. Both give birth to a world. Once we understand that painting repeats the movement of life at the heart of nature, we can see why art is not the reproduction of nature, but its rebirth. This movement, out of which the natural world itself emerges and that drives the growth of the tree and plant, is what the artist needs to repeat and unfold. As such, art furthers life.¹⁸ Klee argues that, more than simply not being a "copy" of natural "realities," when painting takes up nature into the work there is a "necessary deformation" attending this rebirth. Such a deformation of "realities" is not at all a failing or failure of art. Quite the contrary, it is the consequence of the vital energy that defines art, just as the crown of the tree is the outgrowth of the vital energy sent forth by the roots of the tree. The real failing of art, if one is to speak of that, is lodged in the effort to wed oneself to the "realities" of nature and to insist upon their "reproduction" or "representation," rather than letting this deformation take place. But this deformation is not, in the end, of

great significance since the artist knows that the finished "forms of appearance" and such "realities" in nature do not come close to its heart. That heart is first found once one approaches nature's "formative powers":

First, he does not attach any compelling significance to natural forms of appearance as do many realist critics. The artist does not feel so closely tied to *these* realities because he does not see these finished forms as the essence of the creative processes of nature. Rather, the artist places more worth upon the formative powers, than the resulting forms.

The artist is, perhaps unintentionally, a philosopher. And while, like the optimists he does not hold this world to be the best of all possible worlds, and while he will also not say that this world around us is too bad to be taken as an example, he will nonetheless say:

In its present shape, this is not the only possible world of all worlds.

In this way, the artist surveys with a penetrating gaze the things which nature parades, formed, before his eyes.

The deeper he looks, the easier it is for him to extend his view from today to yesterday. In this way, he is all the more deeply imprinted by the essential image of creation as genesis, rather than by the images of the finished products of nature....

There, where the central organ of all movement—temporal and spatial alike—whether it is called the brain or the heart of creation, activates all functions—who would not want to dwell there as an artist? In the womb of nature, in the archaic ground of creation, where the secret key to all lies kept safe....

But our pounding heart drives us down from above, deep down to the archaic.

That which grows up from these drives, whatever it is called—be it dream, idea, phantasm—is only to be taken with complete seriousness if it is united in a form with the proper means of making images [*passenden Bildnerischen Mitteln* *restlos zur Gestaltung verbindet*].

Then those curiosities become realities, they become the realities of art that enlarge life as

16 Klee, "Vortrag Jeno," 51–53 [emphasis added]. Interestingly, Hegel will use similar language when he speaks of the beauty of art as "spirit that is born and reborn" (Hegel, *Phänomenologie*, 14).

17 The view of painting as a representation of nature is, however, the most entrenched and long-standing conception of painting. One finds it exemplified already in the ancient world in the story that Pliny tells about a contest between Zeuxis and Parrhasius to see which one of them was the greater artist, that is, the contest was to see who could best represent nature. When Zeuxis unveiled his paintings of grapes they looked so real that birds came and pecked at them. Zeuxis then asked Parrhasius to draw back the curtain on his painting only to discover that the curtain was his painting. The comment was that Zeuxis fooled the birds, but Parrhasius fooled Zeuxis (Pliny, *Naturalis Historia* 34.36).

18 On this, see Walter Benjamin's review of Karl Blossfeldt's book of photographs of plants, *Urformen der Natur* ("Neues von Blumen," *Die literarische Welt* 25 [Nov. 1928]: 7). Benjamin's point that the primal forms of nature are the same as the primal forms of art nicely echoes Klee's claim in his lecture. Interestingly, Blossfeldt's book was Kondinsky's gift to Klee for Klee's fiftieth birthday (1929).

it typically seems.

Because the realities of art not only more or less give back (with some feeling) what is seen; they also make secret visions visible.¹⁹

If one wants to say that the painter “copies” or “repeats” nature, then it is the power of nature to create, to bring into being, the life of nature—not any of the particular results of that life—that is “repeated.” In the end, the heart of painting has everything to do with this movement of life and little—if anything—to do with objects. One sees this in Klee’s work in several ways: the way that lines still seem to be in the process of coming together, still en route to something (see plate 14); the way a sort of palimpsest of lines and colors gives the impression of real movement (see plate 15); and the way there is an instability in the image that keeps it on the move (see plate 16).

This distance from a concern with objects and with the visible, this preferred proximity to the *life* of nature, is the reason Merleau-Ponty suggested that, for Klee, painting is “the blueprint of a genesis of things.”²⁰ It is not a reproduction of the finished products, of the objects, that are the result of that process of genesis. Modern art is closer to its own heart, to this “genesis of things,” insofar as it has let go of the lure of representation and has recognized that this process of genesis emerges more clearly in abstraction. One might even say that for Klee the object is something of a distraction in the artwork: the given “reality” at any particular moment is contingent and can (and will) look different at another time. No moment of life is sufficient to capture the real movement of life that is always under way, always being born anew. That is why the essence of the painting cannot be found in what is represented since the finished forms of nature—objects—are not what drive the work of art. What drives the work is not found on the visible surfaces that characterize the finished forms—the objects—of appearance. Gripping though these surfaces may be, fascinating for vision that does not see far, objects are, in the end, a distraction from the deepest and most intense vision that guides the painter:

This being so, the artist should be forgiven if he regards the present stage of the appearing world as accidentally fixed temporally and spatially. He regards it altogether inadequate in comparison with the depth of his vision and the intensity of what he feels.²¹

Or, as the opening sentence of “Creative Credo” puts it: “art does not repeat the visible, but makes visible”—what it makes vis-

ible is the life of nature: *genesis itself*.

Two points at the outset of this essay need to be brought forward at its close since together these points help call attention to what seems most distinctive about Klee’s work. The first point concerns Novalis’s remark about “the magic writing [that is life itself]...[and that] will not let itself be brought into a fixed form and seems unwilling to become a higher key.” The second point concerns the ancient Greek word for painting, ζωγραφία: “the writing of life” or “the inscription of life.” Klee’s work—both his theoretical essays and his painterly work—is best understood as responsive to the way in which life, which cannot be brought into a fixed form but remains always and ever a movement, leaves traces of its own genesis, its own birth and becoming. His painting is always an effort to repeat this movement, this writing that is the trace of life itself en route to more of itself, giving birth and dying.

It has always seemed to me that the pleasure one can take in Klee’s painting is distinctive. It is not the pleasure of beauty in any traditional sense. It is rather the pleasure that belongs to the feeling of life coming into being. It is the same fresh pleasure as we take in birth and in witnessing the genesis of things and so being somewhat closer to the heart of creation. ■

19 Klee, “Vortrag Jena,” 64–67.

20 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L’œil et l’esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 74. This sense of the task of painting is far removed from the way in which painters have long spoken of “still life” (or of “natur morte,” “Stilleben”).

21 Klee, “Vortrag Jena,” 65. Cézanne will make a similar claim when he says “To paint nature does not mean to copy objects, but to realize impressions of color,” cited in Günter Seubold, *Kunst als Enteignis* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1996), 119.

Charles W. Haxthausen

“Abstract with Memories”: Klee’s “Auratic” Pictures

Why must nearly everything appear to me as its own parody?
Why must it seem to me as though almost all, no, all techniques
and conventions of art are today suited only for parody?

—Thomas Mann¹

In 1921 Max Doerner, the renowned authority on painting materials and techniques, expressed his alarm at what he perceived as a widespread decline in the technical skills of contemporary painters: “Art has abandoned the sound principles of craftsmanship and is therefore lacking in a dependable foundation.... Only a complete mastery of the materials will give that firm foundation on which the artist can develop an individual style and which will at the same time insure the durability and permanency of his creations. *Craftsmanship must again be made the solid foundation of art.* There is no other road to lead us out of chaos.”² Doerner’s concern was doubtless exacerbated by the experiments of avant-garde artists like Pablo Picasso, Kurt Schwitters, and others who made use of newsprint, sawdust, sand, or junk in their works, or painted on raw linen and even burlap.

Paul Klee’s *Dummies (Attrapen)* (1927; fig. 1), had Doerner seen it, might have seemed a perfect example of the dire results of this “chaos.” In this strange image—three allium-like forms in perspective yet unanchored in space, framed by what appear to be flat, geometrically patterned curtains—some of the colors seem dampened by old varnish; the fine lines appear faded, seemingly due to gradual abrasion, and a delicate web of craquelure covers much of the surface. These are features we might expect to find in a much older painting, and at first encounter they appear to confirm Doerner’s gloomy view of the decline of painterly craft. Yet Klee achieved these effects of deterioration *deliberately*, through that very “mastery of the materials” that Doerner championed.³ He created a work that dramatized its own lack of “durability and permanency,” and it did so from the moment it left his



Fig. 1: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Dummies (Attrapen)*, 1927/295. Oil and watercolor on cardboard nailed to frame, 56.5 x 42.5 cm, Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.

1 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. H. T. Lowe-Porter (1947; New York: Vintage, 1971), 134 (altered translation).
2 Quoted from the foreword to the first German edition (1921), Max Doerner, *The Materials of the Artist and Their Use in Painting with Notes on the Techniques of the Old Masters*, rev. ed., trans. Eugen Neuhaus (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1949), v–vi (emphasis in original).
3 The craquelure, however, is most likely an unintended result of overpainting before the underlayer was dry—one finds this in a number of Klee’s oil paintings.

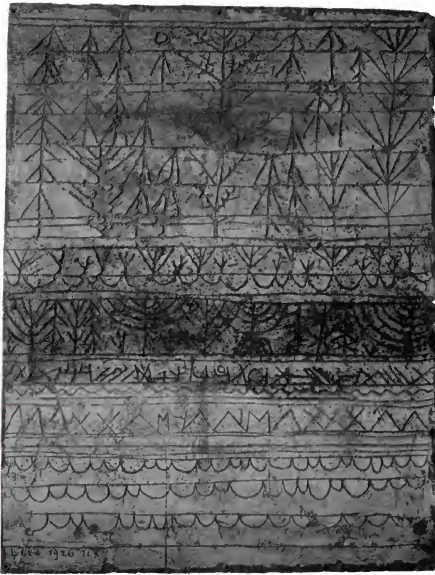


Fig. 2: Paul Klee, *Tablet of a Young Forest (Jungwaldtafel)*, 1926/208. Oil on muslin grounded with plaster over cardboard, mounted on wood, 36 x 25.5 cm, Staatsgalerie Stuttgart.

easel. Since *Dummies* does not remotely relate to any historical style, there could be no mistaking it for an authentic painting from an earlier century. While it appears materially old it is stylistically new. This discord must have been even more startling when the painting was first exhibited in 1931.⁴

Much has been written on the technical innovations of early twentieth-century art—collage, photomontage, assemblage, frottage—but little has been said about Klee's technical practice within this larger context. Yet no artist of his generation experimented so widely with pictorial techniques as did he. Certain cubists, Dadaists, and constructivists may have been more radical in the range of novel materials they introduced into the work of art, but Klee was more resourceful in exploring original effects with traditional artists' materials such as oil, gesso, watercolor, chalk, and fabric supports. His originality lay less in his choice of materials than in his manner of working with them, a manner in which the hand of the artist is not always readily apparent, in which the most salient surface effects sometimes seem to be the product of time rather than of craft.⁵

4 See the entry in Josef Helfenstein and Christian Rümelin, eds., *Paul Klee: Catalogue Raisonné*, 9 vols. (London/New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998–2004), 5:160, #4509.

5 Up to now there has been little in the way of systematic research on Klee's technical practice. The most useful contribution to date is the article by Natalie Bäschlin, Béatrice Ilg, and Patrizia Zeppetella, "Beiträge zur Maltechnik von Paul Klee," in *Paul Klee: Kunst und Karriere: Beiträge des internationalen Symposiums in Bern*, ed. Oskar Bächtli and Josef Hel-

Three conservators with extensive experience in treating Klee's works have noted how he combined a conscientiously acquired practice of sound, traditional painting techniques with destructive processes such as scratching and abrading the painting surface, achieving surface effects such as we find in aged, poorly conserved objects: "The surfaces often appear fragile, their structure suggests the marks of age. In actuality Klee's paint layers are usually astonishingly weak in their binding properties, and correspond to the effect of truly worn, weathered surfaces."⁶

This practice of deliberately simulating the effects of time and physical decay, although limited to a relatively small number of Klee's works, extends through the 1920s up to at least 1935 and is concentrated in the years between 1922 and 1927, when he was teaching at the Bauhaus. We find such effects in *Arrival of the Jugglers (Ankunft der Gaukler)* (1926),⁷ which appears like an incised tablet from which the upper layer has crumbled away at the edges, and in *Tablet of a Young Forest (Jungwaldtafel)* of the same year (fig. 2), where the incised gesso surface appears stained, scarred, and worn, like an old gravestone, by a long, gradual process of natural erosion. This was probably one of the works that the Berlin critic Karl Scheffler had in mind when, in a critical review of a 1928 solo exhibition, he remarked that "within his small domain Klee knows how effects are achieved and he can cook up a concoction of old and new art like no one else." Certain works—perhaps Scheffler was thinking of *Cathedral (Kathedrale)* (1924; fig. 3) with its worn, faded appearance and densely ordered rows of delicately scratched patterns—reminded him of "old materials with indecipherable script."⁸ Such pictures seem to take the effect of age as their theme—a rarity in the art of the early twentieth century.⁹

stein (Bern: Stämpfli, 2000), 173–203. The authors discuss Klee's technical practice as a painter in a well-documented historical context. See also Wolfgang Kersten and Osamu Okuda, *Paul Klee: Im Zeichen der Teilung: Die Geschichte zerschnittener Kunst Paul Klees 1883–1940*, exh. cat. (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 1995). In this work the authors document 122 works that Klee dissected with scissors, from which 270 new works resulted. In contrast to the collages of Picasso, Braque, Ernst, and Schwitters and the photomontages of Höch and Hausmann, Klee was cutting up his own compositions—not wallpaper, faux bois, newspapers, or labels—and creating new ones out of those fragments.

6 Bäschlin, Ilg, and Zeppetella, "Beiträge zur Maltechnik," 202–203. Wolfgang Kersten and Anne Trembley have characterized Klee's painting technique as "a provocation of matter," a provocation, they suggest, that deliberately undermined the physical stability of the picture. They propose that in his late works Klee, in his pursuit of pictorial expression, willingly accepted the prospect of a rapid decay of the work. See Wolfgang Kersten and Anne Trembley, "Malerei als Provokation der Materie," in *Paul Klee: Das Schaffen im Todesjahr*, ed. Josef Helfenstein and Stefan Frey (Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern, 1990), 77–90. Responding to this thesis in their essay, Bäschlin, Ilg, and Zeppetella, drawing on their extensive experience in treating Klee's pictures, concede that Klee did indeed tax the durability of his media to the extreme, yet they endorse Kersten and Trembley's thesis only conditionally. They conclude, "Klee's practice is shaped more by his acceptance of the mutability of his media than by a deliberate staging of their material decay or disintegration" ("Beiträge zur Maltechnik," 202–203).

7 Helfenstein and Rümelin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 4:495, #4161.

8 Karl Scheffler, "Paul Klee," *Kunst und Künstler* 26, no. 5 (1928): 321. Both of these works were in the exhibition that he reviewed, *Paul Klee*, at Galerie Alfred Flechtner, March–April 1928, cat. nos. 3 and 12.

9 The only other major European artist of Klee's generation to have produced a comparable body of work is Constantin Brancusi during the early years of his career. See, for example, his limestone sculpture *Wisdom of the Earth*

Klee's simulation of the traces of age in modernist works that are playfully offered as relics of some distant era marks an original intervention in a centuries-old discourse on the aesthetics of age. Although such works are small in number within his immense oeuvre, their pointed embrace of intertemporality and intertemporality are paradigmatic for much of his artistic production. His art abounds in fictive artifacts—works that allude to visual traditions of many eras and cultures. It offers perhaps the richest example within modernism of how, as Jacques Rancière has argued, “the future of art... incessantly restages the past.”¹⁰ Simultaneously looking to the future and the past, Klee's works exemplify the “co-presence of heterogeneous temporalities” that Rancière sees as distinctive of modernism, which in his unorthodox view is “first of all a new regime for relating to the past.”¹¹ In Klee's art we find a uniquely rich expression of that regime.

AGE

One of the earliest examples of Klee's simulation of the effects of age is *Carpet of Memory* (*Teppich der Erinnerung*), dated 1914 by the artist (fig. 4). It is executed in oil on a frayed, irregular piece of linen grounded with chalk and oil pigment and is mounted on cardboard so that its textural identity as fabric is enhanced. Writing on this work, Jürgen Glaesemer noted Klee's

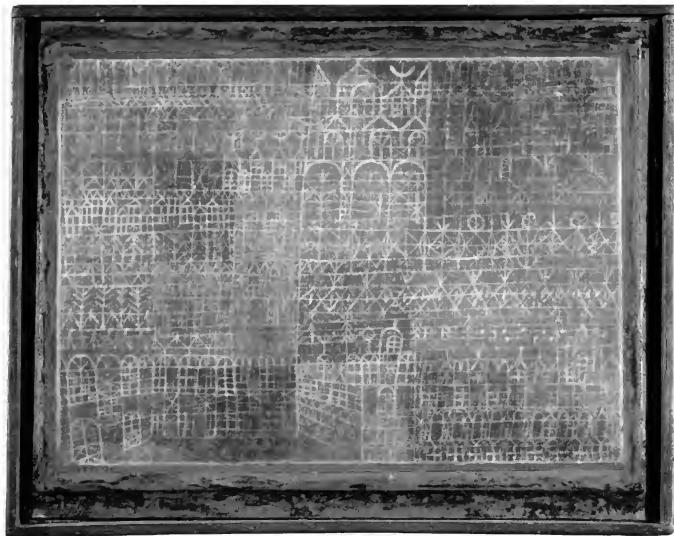


Fig. 3: Paul Klee, *Cathedral* (*Kathedrale*), 1924/138. Watercolor and oil glaze on paper, bordered in watercolor, on cardboard, secured to wood with plaster, 30.1 x 35.5 cm, The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC.

“great care in achieving the impression of a strongly worn material by artificial soiling of the surface, through deliberately frayed edges...as well as by means of seemingly artless application of paint. The idea of a long used, cherished object suggested a ‘carpet’ to which memories cling.”¹² We now know that the effects Glaesemer so evocatively described date from a later reworking. This painting originally bore the title *Architektur intérieur*, was oriented ninety degrees to the left and mounted on a stretcher. Not until 1921 at the earliest, the year in which Klee adopted the style of dating we see on the mat, did the work acquire its present appearance and title. Only then, when he removed the canvas from the stretcher and mounted it on cardboard did those “frayed edges” come into play, which, with an indispensable assist from the new title, transform the painting into a “carpet of memory.”¹³

In this, its final form, Klee offers *Carpet of Memory* not as a representation of a carpet, an object depicted within an illusionistic space, but as a sample, an exemplification—or, rather, a pseudo-exemplification—of a type of artifact.¹⁴ And what seemed

(1908) and his heavily abraded sandstone *Donoide* (c. 1907–09). See Friedrich Tejo Boch, Morgit Rowell, and Ann Temkin, *Constantin Brancusi, 1876–1957*, exh. cat. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1995), 92–93, 98–99. Yet in Brancusi's case, in contrast to that of Klee, the sculptures' orchoizing styles match their aged surface appearance. Indeed, when *Wisdom of the Earth* was first exhibited in Bucharest, one critic thought it to looked like an orchoeological find from some Egyptian desert. See Doïno Lemny, *Constantin Brancusi* (Paris: OXUS, 2005), 40. I am grateful to Andono Streng for this reference.

10 Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 24.

11 Rancière sees a sequence of three major “oristic regimes” in the West: the ethical regime, the representative regime, and, beginning in the eighteenth century, the oesthetic regime. “The oesthetic regime of the arts is the regime that strictly identifies art in the singular and frees it from any specific rule, from any hierarchy of the arts, subject matter, and genres.... It simultaneously establishes the autonomy of art and the identity of its form with the forms that life uses to shape itself” (ibid., 20–26).

12 Jürgen Glaesemer, *Paul Klee: Die farbigen Werke im Kunstmuseum Bern* (Bern: Kornfeld, 1976), 34. See also the similar, but more detailed description of the work by Andeheinz Mösser, *Das Problem der Bewegung bei Paul Klee* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1976), 53–54.

13 See Osamu Okudo, “Paul Klee: Buchhaltung, Werkbezeichnung und Werkprozess,” in *Radical Art History: Internationale Anthologie; Subject, O. K. Werkmeister, ed. Wolfgang Kersten*, in collaboration with Joon Weinstein (Zurich: ZIP, 1997), 379–90.

14 On the difference between representation, or denotation, and exemplification, see Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of*

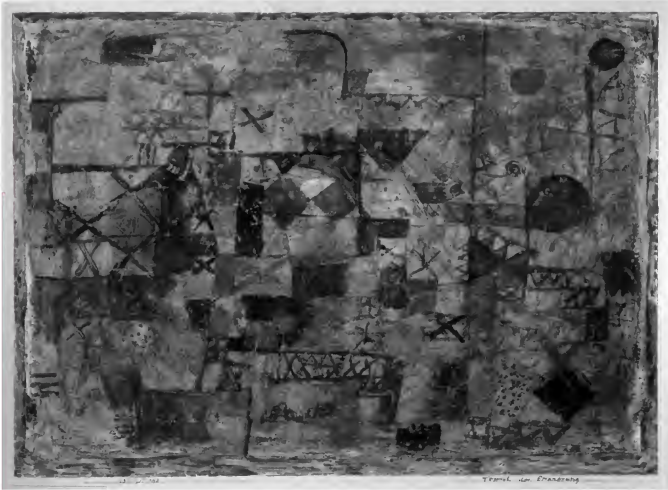


Fig. 4: Paul Klee, *Carpet of Memory (Teppich der Erinnerung)*, 1914/1913. Oil on linen ground with oil and chalk, with watercolor border, on cardboard, 37.8 x 49.5 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

clearly to interest Klee here was to evoke, through his title and the soiled, frayed appearance of the work, that manner of experiencing an artifact that is conditioned primarily by the beholder's sense of its existence through time.¹⁵ In *Carpet of Memory* this duration is signified by the marks that have ostensibly accrued during the passage of time and through gradual material deterioration, marks that appear to have taken a toll on the original, intended appearance of the object. It is these simulated indexical signs, in combination with the title, that evoke an old carpet and suggest its fate as an object subject to abrasions from human use and the natural law of decay. It is this phenomenon to which Klee's title alludes: the contemplation of an old, familiar object conjures up memories of its association with persons, events, and experiences. Such memories fuse with our perception, and yet they are not something visible that physically clings to the object, they are not woven into its material structure, and they are independent of the intentions of its maker. Although founded on concrete events, they exist only within human subjectivity. Klee's painting, then, conjures up the kind of experience we can have with objects with a long history—a venerable family possession or an object encountered in a museum. In the former case the memories are personal, in the latter they may be merely the projection of viewers as they conjure up the personalities and events "witnessed" by this object. Of course in reality Klee's "carpet" has no such history, and we know that. What is thematized here is a specific kind of subjective experience and the mood it awakens.

The simulation of the traces of age is in itself nothing new in

the history of art. The ancient Romans produced "weathered" copies of Greek art; in the Renaissance patina began to be applied to new sculptures; in the seventeenth century paintings were artificially aged by varnish and other techniques and put in decrepit frames, often to further the aims of forgers.¹⁶ By the eighteenth century a common view among art connoisseurs was that time made a picture more beautiful.¹⁷

In the nineteenth century the effect of age was particularly valued in works of art and architecture—the British critic John Ruskin was the most famous exponent of this aesthetic. "Fortunately for mankind," he wrote, "as some counterbalance to that wretched love of novelty...which

especially characterizes all vulgar minds, there is set in the deeper places of the heart such affection for the signs of age that the eye is delighted even by injuries which are the work of time."¹⁸ "The greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age,...it is in the golden stain of time that we are to look for the real light, and color, and preciousness of architecture."¹⁹ He had little to say, however, about the signs of age in paintings, except to praise in them "the golden tone that time has left."²⁰ And even as he praised the beauty of the traces of age in old buildings, he was sternly critical of those artists who made such effects the focus of their painting. This "picturesqueness" Ruskin attacked as "parasitical sublimity," a sublimity "not inherent in the nature of the thing, but caused by something external to it." It was a "sublimity dependent on the accidents, or on the least essential characters, of the objects to which it belongs." The "extreme striving" for such effects Ruskin condemned as a "degradation of art."²¹

The Austrian art historian Alois Riegl addressed the issue of the modern appreciation of signs of age in buildings and artifacts

16 On the concept of patina and the history of its appreciation see Thomas Brachert, *Patina: Von Nutzen und Nachteil der Restaurierung* (Munich: Callwey, 1985); also see David Lowenthal, "Appreciating the Look of Age," in *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 148–82.

17 On the preference for patinated pictures in the eighteenth century, see Brachert, *Patina*, 45–48.

18 John Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols. (London: George Allen, 1903–12), 3:319–20.

19 Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, in *Complete Works*, 8:233–34.

20 Ruskin, "The National Gallery," in *Complete Works*, 12:399.

21 Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 8:236–37.

Symbols (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968), 3–95.

15 Mösser, *Das Problem der Bewegung*, 53–54.

in a more thorough and systematic fashion, and attempted to place it within a historical development. His "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," published in 1903 as the introduction to the Austrian architectural preservation law, has interesting implications for Klee's practice.²² Riegl traced the historical evolution of the values that Western culture had attached to monuments and historical artifacts, from classical antiquity to the present. All human works designated as monuments serve what Riegl called "remembrance value" (*Erinnerungswert*). In the course of history this was supplemented by other values, and in defining these Riegl distinguished between "intentional" and "unintentional" monuments. The earliest monuments were intentional monuments, that is, they were intended by those who created them "to keep present and alive in the consciousness of later generations individual human deeds or fates."²³ Throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages, according to Riegl, there were no monuments other than intentional monuments. Only in fifteenth-century Italy did there emerge a new type of remembrance value, "historical value" (*historischer Wert*). With this there appeared the category of the unintentional historical monument—unintentional, because its status as a monument did not depend on the intentions of its originators, but on its being valued by later generations as representing a stage in a historical development.²⁴

In the course of subsequent centuries the domain of historical interest was extended, until by the nineteenth century it included "the most remote peoples, separated from one's own nation by unbridgeable differences."²⁵ Yet, wrote Riegl, "if the nineteenth century was the age of historical value, then the twentieth century appears to be that of age value" (*Alterswert*).²⁶ According to Riegl, neither the object's original function nor its historical or artistic significance were the basis of this value, but merely its survival over time and the visible traces of its age.²⁷

As soon as the individual entity (whether formed by humans or created by nature) has taken shape, the destructive activity of nature begins.... Through the traces of this process one sees that a monument is not of recent origin but was created at some more or less distant time in the past, and the age value of a monument therefore rests on the obvious perception of these traces. The most drastic example is the...ruin.... Age value manifests

itself more compellingly, however, through the less violent effects—evident more to touch than to sight—of the corrosion of surfaces (patina, weathering)...through which Nature's slow, but nonetheless certain, inexorable and irresistible work of disintegration manifests itself.²⁸

Through age value, Riegl claimed, the subjective mood generated by the contemplation of an object was valued over its historical significance, for "in the twentieth century we take special pleasure in the purely natural cycle of becoming and passing away."²⁹ This emergent appreciation of age value, he argued, was a consequence of "the emancipation of the individual in modern times," and his desire to transcend an objective physical and psychic perception in favor of subjective experience.³⁰ Such objects, with their signs of disintegration, became, according to Riegl, nothing more than indispensable catalysts for subjective reveries on the "life cycle," on the inevitable process of decay brought on by the passage of time and by natural law.³¹

Considering Klee's practice in *Carpet of Memory* with reference to this discourse we can now see that while his composition seems clearly to have been inspired by the modern appreciation of *Alterswert*, this age value is manifest in a form that would have been inconceivable to both Ruskin and Riegl. First, this painting, executed in a cubistic style, is patently modern; no one could ever suppose the signs of age to be genuine. Second, Klee did not attempt to imitate the appearance, the pattern, the texture, let alone the size of a carpet—the composition measures only thirty-eight by fifty centimeters. The picture, then, is clearly neither old nor a carpet. That we do not regard Klee's carpet as an actual carpet distinguishes his work from forgeries of aged artifacts as well as from patently new objects, such as meerschaum pipes, imitation antique furniture, and faded blue jeans in which the visible effects of age have been simulated. In the latter case, such objects are after all authentically pipes, chairs, tables, and jeans, however spurious the signs of their temporality.

Klee's painting could be classified as a strange mutation of Ruskin's "parasitical sublime," for its most salient effect may be said to be less a product of its form or composition than of "accidents" of its surface, which evoke a process of decay that would have ostensibly begun after its completion. Klee, however, differs from those painters of the parasitical sublime scorned by Ruskin because he is not concerned with representing the marks of time in a *motif*, but simulates them in the material structure of the painting itself. Yet the painting would be nonetheless "parasitical" in Ruskin's sense, since its appearance and aesthetic effect are determined primarily by these "external traces of age" rather than by the work's "essential" form. Further, the effect is deliberately and artfully feigned by the artist himself, so that it belongs to the very nature of the work and constitutes the basis of a conscious aesthetic. To speak in Riegl's categories, the age value has

22 Alois Riegl, "Der moderne Denkmalkultus, sein Wesen, seine Entstehung" (1903), in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Vienna: WUV-Universitätsverlag, 1996), 139–84. English translation: "The Modern Cult of Monuments: Its Character and Its Origin," trans. Kurt W. Forster and Diane Ghirardo, *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982): 21–51. All English translations that follow will be my own. See also Lorenz Dittmann, *Stil, Symbol, Struktur: Studien zu Kategorien der Kunstgeschichte* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 1967), 45–49; Margaret Rose Olin, *Forms of Representation in Alois Riegl's Theory of Art* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 175–80.

23 Riegl, "Der moderne Denkmalkultus," 139.

24 *Ibid.*, 146–47.

25 *Ibid.*, 147.

26 *Ibid.*, 150.

27 *Ibid.*, 144.

28 *Ibid.*, 155.

29 *Ibid.*, 156.

30 *Ibid.*, 150.

31 *Ibid.*, 144.



Fig. 5: Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920/32. Oil transfer and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 31.8 x 24.2 cm, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Gift of Fania and Gershom Scholem; John Herring, Marlene and Paul Herring; Jo Carole and Ronald Lauder, B87.994.

become an “art value” (*Kunstwert*), a combination whose very possibility he himself did not consider. For, in his view, the modern *Kunstwollen* demanded unity and uniformity, and any sign of transience or decay was disturbing.³²

The age value evoked by Klee’s *Carpet of Memory* has a further dimension, one that goes beyond Riegl’s concept. As we have seen, for Riegl age value was limited to the experience of “nature’s slow, but nonetheless certain, inexorable, and irresistible work of disintegration”; the physical decay caused by human use had no part in this experience, even if this, too, is equally a consequence of the laws of physics and chemistry.³³ The signs of age that Klee evoked in his painting, however, are those that result from such use. In this respect, the effect of Klee’s *Carpet of Memory* is closer to the kind of experience that Walter Benjamin famously defined with the term “aura” in his essay, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility.” For the experience of aura as Benjamin described it encompassed not merely the “material duration” (*materielle Dauer*) of an object but its

“historical testimony” (*geschichtliche Zeugenschaft*).³⁴

Already some four decades ago, when the reception of Benjamin had barely begun, his friend Theodor W. Adorno expressed annoyance at the “obtrusive popularity” of this text, which in his view was due in part to its regrettable simplifications.³⁵ What might Adorno say now? Benjamin’s aura theory has grown exponentially more “popular” since then; today writings on it constitute a significant bibliography.³⁶ I introduce aura here because I have found this text has special relevance to the work of Klee—indeed, it was my initial reading of Benjamin’s art-work essay some three decades ago that made me begin to ponder the implications of the practice that is the topic of this essay.³⁷

Usually when the names Klee and Benjamin are linked, it is almost always with reference to Klee’s 1920 watercolor, *Angelus Novus* (fig. 5), which Benjamin acquired in 1921 and which inspired the ninth thesis in his “On the Concept of History,” his last completed text. Yet Klee’s importance for Benjamin goes beyond that. Benjamin esteemed him above all other modern painters; over more than two decades his name appears in Benjamin’s writings and correspondence more than that of any other visual artist. There is much to say on this topic that goes well beyond the scope of the present essay.³⁸ Here my interest is how the writings of Benjamin around the notion of aura can help to illuminate the particular experience of temporality to which Klee’s art gave expression.

32 Ibid., 155. On “artistic value” (*Kunstwert*), which always presupposes historical value, but is distinct from remembrance value, see 140–43. *Kunstwollen* is translated variously as “artistic volition,” “artistic intention,” or “will-to-art.” Concise translations do not quite do the trick. I define it as how a people as a collective entity in a particular place and historical time wishes to see the world configured, as manifested in their art.

33 Riegl deals with the question of use value (*Gebrauchswert*) in his essay, but only to the extent that continued use of an object or a building, and the necessity of keeping it functional, undermines its age value (ibid., 166–70).

34 Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility (Second Version),” in *Selected Writings: Volume 3, 1935–1938*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), 103 [Selected Writings volumes hereafter cited as SW]. Original German text: “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit,” in Walter Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser, 7 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1972–89), 7:353 [Gesammelte Schriften volumes hereafter cited as GS]. Translation of *geschichtliche Zeugenschaft* is altered to “the historical testimony relating to it”; the translator Jephcott misunderstands this phrase as the work’s reception throughout history.

35 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 82.

36 The standard work remains Marleen Stoessel, *Aura, das vergessene Menschliche: Zu Sprache und Erfahrung bei Walter Benjamin* (Munich: C. Hensler, 1983). See also Josef Funnkäs, “Aura,” in *Benjamins Begriffe*, ed. Michael Opitz and Erdmut Witzila (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2000), 95–145, with a bibliography that lists most of the noteworthy works on the topic up to 2000.

37 My own first effort in this area was “Zwischen Darstellung und Parodie: Klees ‘auratische’ Bilder,” in Bötschmann and Helfenstein, *Paul Klee*, 9–26. A slightly expanded English version, “Between Representation and Parody: Klee’s ‘Auratic’ Pictures,” was subsequently published in the Chinese journal, *The Study of Art History* 1, no. 3 (2001): 107–145. I have substantially revised that essay for the present publication.

38 Among noteworthy scholarly studies of particular aspects of the Benjamin-Klee connection are O. K. Werckmeister, “Walter Benjamin, Paul Klee und der ‘Engel der Geschichte,’” in *Versuche über Paul Klee* (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1981), 98–123; English version: “Walter Benjamin, Paul Klee and the ‘Angel of History,’” *Oppositions* 25 (Fall 1982): 103–125; Takako Matsui, *Walter Benjamin und die Kunst des Graphischen: Photo-Graphie, Malerei, Graphik* (Berlin: Humboldt-Universität, 2008), 176–210, 350–59; Annie Bourneuf, “Radically Uncolourful Painting: Walter Benjamin and the Problem of Cubism,” *Grey Room* 39 (Spring 2010), 74–93.

"AURA"

In his earliest extended remarks on aura Benjamin characterized it as something that "undergoes changes...with every movement of the object whose aura it is."³⁹ The same could be said of his "concept" of aura, for there is no single, clearly defined concept; his treatment of it, in various texts from the 1930s, seems ever shifting, marked by "numerous contradictions and inconsistencies."⁴⁰ In his first substantive, albeit brief, remarks on aura, Benjamin held that "genuine aura appears in all things, not just in certain kinds of things." Its "characteristic feature...is ornament, an ornamental halo, in which the object or being is enclosed as in a case. Perhaps nothing gives such a clear idea of aura as Van Gogh's late paintings, in which one could say that aura appears to have been painted together with the various objects."⁴¹ In his "Little History of Photography," published a year-and-a-half later, in October 1931, Benjamin had complicated this notion considerably, arguing that a decay of aura had begun in the nineteenth century; that modern photographers had initiated "the emancipation of object from aura," a "peeling away of the object's shell," a "shattering of the aura."⁴² Five years later, in "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility," he introduced new elements into his characterization, as he now focused on the aura of traditional art objects, the effect of their reproduction, and on the medium of film.⁴³ In "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1940), the third and last of the essays in which Benjamin addressed the issue of aura in depth, the concept underwent further elaboration and modification, and the focus shifted away from visual artifacts to the functions of memory.⁴⁴

In both the photography and artwork essays Benjamin defined "aura" as a "strange weave [Gespinnis] of space and

time: the unique apparition [or semblance] of a distance, however near it may be" (*Ein sonderbares Gespinnst von Raum und Zeit: einmalige Erscheinung einer Ferne, so nah sie sein mag*).⁴⁵ Marleen Stoessel, in her fundamental study of Benjamin's theory of aura, has provided a useful elucidation of this cryptic definition:

The true paradox should have read: "unique apparition of a distance in what is near," a non-elliptical and undoubtedly less pointed sentence, however, might read "unique apparition of a distance, however close the object may be in which it appears." This would make it clear...that the distance can only be the temporal distance and that something spatial, the more or less proximate object, is its only possible empirical reason for appearing.⁴⁶

Precisely this "strange weave of space and time" is found in certain works by Klee, yet in *simulated* form.

While Benjamin's photography and artwork essays share the definition cited above, there are substantive differences between them in terms of where they locate aura and, in the later text, how it expands the definition with reference to art objects (painting and sculpture) and film.⁴⁷ These differences merit examination here, for they are crucial for locating precisely what I am calling *simulated aura* in certain works by Klee. In the earlier text Benjamin locates aura in the photographic *image*, specifically in the photographic portrait, which captures the unique historical congruence of a nascent bourgeois class with a nascent, still primitive visual medium. "There was an aura about them [the

39 Walter Benjamin, "Hashish, Beginning of March 1930," in *Selected Writings: Volume 2, 1927–1934*, ed. Marcus Paul Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 328; GS, 6:581.

40 This is the judgment of Stoessel, *Aura*, 78. As Josef Furrnkäs writes in his very useful essay on Benjamin's use of the term: "The concept of aura is nowhere to be found in Benjamin's own writings. All there is are several remarks, often hard to reconcile with one another, regarding a hardly objectifiable phenomenon of perception" (Furrnkäs, "Aura," 103). In a more recent article, Miriam Hansen concurs on the matter of the term's elusiveness: "Anything but a clearly delimited, stable concept, aura describes a cluster of meanings and relations that appear in Benjamin's writings in various configurations and not always under its own name." She also seeks to dissociate the term from "a narrowly aesthetic understanding," which, she argues, "rests on a reductive reading of Benjamin, even of his famous essay 'The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility'" (Miriam Bratu Hansen, "Benjamin's Aura," *Critical Inquiry* 34 [Winter 2007]: 337, 339). While I accept the wider meaning of the term she outlines in her article, here, with regard to Klee, I am concerned with just such an aesthetic application.

41 Benjamin, *SW* 2, 328.

42 Benjamin, *SW* 2, 507–530, 518–19 (altered translation). Original German text, "Kleine Geschichte der Photographie," in *GS*, 2:368–85.

43 Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 101–133; third version (1939) in Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings: Volume 4, 1938–1940*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2003), 251–83. Original German text of second version: "Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit," in *GS*, 7:350–84; third version *GS*, 1:473–508.

44 Benjamin, *SW* 4, 313–55; *GS*, 1:607–53.

45 Benjamin, *SW* 2, 518; *SW* 3, 104–105; *GS*, 2:178; *GS*, 7:355. The passage, identical in the two original texts (except for the replacement of *aus* with *von* in the artwork essay), is given divergent translations in the Harvard edition. This passage is omitted in the third version of the essay.

46 Stoessel, *Aura*, 45. In the opening of a manuscript for a lecture on Johann Peter Hebel from 1929, Benjamin, before he had yet written about "aura," offers, without naming it as such, an account of the "strange weave of space and time" that illuminates that elliptical definition. He describes the subjective experience that occurs when reading in a newspaper "a report of a major fire here, or of a murder.... And if you attempted to imagine the event nearer [Näher] to you, then undoubtedly, whether you were aware of it or not, you did something very strange. Namely you created a kind of photomontage, in which you unconsciously fused with the place of the event—perhaps it happened in Goldap or Tilsit and you are not at all familiar with the city—elements from a locale that is familiar to you,...and indeed perhaps like your house or your living room in Frankfurt. Your house or living room, which now all at once were transported to Tilsit or Goldap. Yet in reality the opposite happened; Tilsit or Goldap were transported to your living room. And you even went a step further. After you had effected the "here," you moved toward realizing the "now." The report was perhaps dated September 11th and you read it only on the 15th. Now if you want to grasp the story, then you don't transport yourself back four days in time but, on the contrary, you imagine: that is now happening at this moment and in my living room. In the passing of a moment you have given this abstract, arbitrary sensational event a here and now" (Benjamin, *GS*, 2:635; emphasis in original). The compound noun "here and now" will be integral to Benjamin's description of the experience of aura in both the photography and artwork essays. This lecture on Hebel is the only other place it occurs in his collected writings.

47 See my "Reproduction/Repetition: Walter Benjamin/Carl Einstein," *October*, no. 107 (Winter 2004): 47–74, especially 48–54.

early portraits], a medium that lent fullness and security to their gaze even as it penetrated that medium." This aura was associated with the moment of the exposure: "the beholder feels an irresistible urge to search such a picture for the tiny spark of contingency, of the here and now [Hier und Jetzt], with which reality has [so to speak] seared the subject, to find the inconspicuous spot where in the immediacy of that long-forgotten moment the future nests so eloquently that we, looking back, may rediscover it."⁴⁸

Five years later in the artwork essay, the binomial "here and now" recurs, but it has now been displaced from the *image*, from a fugitive moment in the past captured by a camera, to the artwork itself as *material artifact*.

In even the most perfect reproduction one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art—its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence—and nothing else—that bears the mark of the history to which it [the artwork] has been subjected in the course of its existence. This history includes changes it has suffered [erlitten] in its physical structure over time, as well as any changes in the circumstances of its ownership.⁴⁹

Concomitant with these attributes of aura is another determinant that Benjamin also introduces in the artwork essay:

The here and now of the original underlies the concept of its *authenticity*, and on the latter in turn is founded the idea of a tradition which has passed the object down as the same, identical thing to the present day. The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological—and of course not only technological—reproduction.⁵⁰

The famous thesis of the artwork essay is that technological reproduction and the resulting mass multiplication and dissemination of reproductions of artworks have led to a decay of their aura: "What withers in the age of the technological reproducibility of the work of art is the work's aura."⁵¹

In Benjamin's artwork essay the physical changes in the

object play a less significant role in aura than they do in Riegl's *Alterswert*; patina and other conspicuous traces of age are not essential to auratic experience.⁵² Although Riegl emphasized the primacy of subjective experience in age value, that experience was nonetheless triggered by the physical facts of material disintegration. Not so for Benjamin: although he speaks in his artwork essay of the aura of the object, of its having an "auratic mode of existence [auratische Daseinsweise],"⁵³ at bottom he is talking about an experience of the subject. "In a strict sense," writes Stoessel, "aura can...not possibly be something that appears externally, but only as a content in the mind of the beholder. This is seemingly an inner image, that is a memory or vision, that fuses with the external appearance." According to her, this experience is manifest "only in the relation between a subject and an object."⁵⁴ Although the experience of temporal distance is essential to Benjamin's concept of aura, what is most important is not the perceptible signs of this distance but the subject's sense of the object's *authenticity*: "The authenticity of a thing," declared Benjamin, "is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, from its material duration to its historical testimony."⁵⁵

The value we place on the uniqueness of the "authentic" work of art has, according to Benjamin, its origin in the ritual function—initially magical, then religious—of the oldest works.⁵⁶ The "auratic mode of existence" of a work of art is most closely linked with these beginnings in cultic practice, and this cult value attached to the art object survived as "secularized ritual in the most profane forms of the cult of beauty" that began in the Renaissance. As art increasingly became the object of a secular cult of beauty, the uniqueness of the cult image was gradually supplanted in the mind of the beholder by the uniqueness of the artist; the authenticity of the object, its status as an original work from the hand of a given master, displaced its cult value, but the work nevertheless retained its aura.⁵⁷

While studying in Rome as a young man, Klee recorded several experiences of a kind that, thirty-five years later, Benjamin

48 Benjamin, SW 2, 510, 515–16; GS, 2:371, 376 (emphasis added).

49 Benjamin, SW 3, 103 (altered translation); GS, 7:352. It is noteworthy that some of the major contributors to the scholarship on aura, including Stoessel, ignore this important passage, perhaps because within Benjamin's discussion of aura it is unique to the artwork essay. Yet it is precisely this passage that is the basis for my association of Klee's practice with Benjamin's "aura." Klee's simulated aura is an aura of the artifact, not an aura in and of the image, as Benjamin experienced it in Van Gogh's paintings and early portrait photography.

50 Benjamin, SW 3, 103; GS, 7:352 (emphasis added). Benjamin uses the term "here and now" in one other instance in the artwork essay, when discussing the authority, the "aura" of a stage actor before a live audience (SW 3, 112).

51 Benjamin, SW 3, 103–104 (altered translation); GS, 7:352–53.

52 Benjamin does not explicitly mention patina in the second version of the essay; he introduces it only in an interpolation in the 1939 revision, when he writes: "Chemical analyses of the patina of a bronze can help to establish its authenticity, just as the proof that a given manuscript of the Middle Ages came from an archive of the fifteenth century helps to establish its authenticity" (Benjamin, SW 4, 253; GS, 1:476).

53 Benjamin, SW 3, 105; GS, 7:55–56.

54 Stoessel, *Aura*, 25, 46. Or, as another commentator puts it, the auratic object becomes "a projection field for the subjectivity of the beholder." Birgit Reckl, *Aura and Autonomie: zur Subjektivität der Kunst bei Walter Benjamin und Theodor W. Adorno* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1988), 24.

55 Benjamin, SW 3, 103 (altered translation); GS, 7:353.

56 As Horst Bredekamp has shown, this aspect of Benjamin's thesis is contradicted by the historical facts, and those facts had been established by art historians long before Benjamin wrote his artwork essay. During the Middle Ages cult images were duplicated in order to extend their ostensible powers. If the form of a cult image or a reliquary was reproduced, then its redemptive or healing power, i.e., its aura, was transferred to the reproduction. The cult value was therefore not diminished but intensified by reproduction. Horst Bredekamp, "Der simulierte Benjamin: Mittelalterliche Bemerkungen zu seiner Aktualität," in *Frankfurter Schule und Kunstgeschichte*, ed. Andreas Berndt et al. (Berlin: Dietrich Reimer, 1992), 125–33.

57 Benjamin, SW 4, 272n12; GS, 1:481n8. This note is found only in the third (1939) version of the text.

would characterize as auratic, although these experiences were triggered in Klee's case by the manifest signs of duration. The most notable one involved the bronze sculpture of St. Peter in the eponymous Basilica in Rome, today attributed to Arnolfo di Cambio but at the time still believed to be an early Christian work from the fifth century.⁵⁸ Encountering the statue surrounded by devout pilgrims, Klee was put off by their fervent piety; he could not empathize with the enduring ritual function of the work. Yet in its "imperfect stiffness," in striking contrast to the flurry of activity around it, it seemed to him "like something eternal, while its foot, worn down by kisses, appeared on the other hand as a fascinating admission of the temporal."⁵⁹ This encounter is exemplary for Benjamin's concept of aura as "the unique apparition of a distance, however near it may be." The distance, to recall Stoessel's gloss, is a temporal distance—Klee, following Burckhardt's Cicerone, would have believed it a distance of some fifteen centuries—experienced in something spatially proximate that bore, in its physical structure, the traces of its long duration as well as of its cult function. Yet, in this case what Benjamin described as sequential historical phases is here synchronically united—namely enduring religious ritual and, for the modern aesthete, the "secularized ritual...of the cult of beauty." Here Klee discovered a source of poetic effect, a poetics of the aura. He wrote to his fiancée Lily Stumpf that the pleasure he derived from this work, "with its feet worn away by kisses," would stay with him a long time.⁶⁰

With regard to Klee's later practice of simulating such auratic effects, another passage from this same Italian diary is even more striking. It is in an entry in which he recorded his reaction to Botticelli's *Primavera* in the Galleria Antica e Moderna in Florence, in which he responded to what Benjamin would call the "historical testimony" of the painting's physical condition:

Naturally it surprised me at first, because I had imagined it falsely, but also in terms of its quality. Partly as a result of its colorlessness due to damage. That constitutes the historical dimension of this work and is an integral part of it. It would be something else again if, like [Franz von] Lenbach, one wanted to offer new pictures with ruined color. Who knows whether, having learned to love the patina of the centuries, we would reject the pictures in their original condition.⁶¹

In the 1920s Klee began—though in a spirit vastly different from Lenbach⁶²—to simulate "the patina of the centuries" in some of his own paintings and watercolors, endowing them with the apparent material traces of a long "history" at the moment of their creation.

Only in the artwork essay did Benjamin explicitly associate aura with the authenticity of the unique artifact. Moreover, while in the Baudelaire essay as in the photography text he identified aura as investing an object we look at "with the ability to look back at us," he never characterized traditional artworks in this way.⁶³ It is tempting to speculate whether his introduction of authenticity as quintessential to the artwork's aura, integral to his displacement of aura from image and the objects within an image (e.g., in Van Gogh's paintings) to the material artifact itself, was inspired by a controversy on reproduction that took place just as Benjamin himself became interested in the issue of technological reproducibility and its implications for the status of the original artwork. Beginning in March 1929, the controversy played out over a year in the Hamburg-based journal *Der Kreis*, ignited by an article by Max Sauerlandt, director of the city's Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe.⁶⁴ The debate was precisely about the consequences of improved reproduction techniques, particularly in facsimiles, for the status of the art object. Some felt a sense of alarm about the devaluation of the original art object. A work of art, Sauerlandt insisted, was "at once a palpably corporeal and spiritually animate existence," and because of the former it obeyed that natural law of all matter, "the law of aging."⁶⁵ Following Sauerlandt's lead, several authors cited the material duration of the artifact, including what Benjamin would call "changes...in its physical structure," as an essential condition of its authenticity. Indeed, one of the contributors, Kurt Karl Eberlein, explicitly associated the time-bound physical aspects

58 This is the dating given in the sculpture's brief mention in Jacob Burckhardt's *Der Cicerone*, which Klee used as his guide to the art and architecture of Italy. There is no version of the book in Klee's surviving library, but he probably used the eighth revised and expanded edition, published in 1900, to which I did not have access. From the seventh (1898) to the tenth (1909) edition however, the description remains unchanged. See Jacob Burckhardt, with C. von Fabriczy, *Der Cicerone: Eine Anleitung zum Genuß der Kunstwerke Italiens*, ed. Wilhelm von Bode, 7th rev. ed. (Leipzig: E. A. Seemann, 1900), 2:1.

59 Letter of Oct. 31, 1901, in Paul Klee, *Briefe an die Familie: 1893–1940*, ed. Felix Klee, 2 vols. (Cologne: DuMont, 1979), 1:163. A variant is found in Paul Klee, *Tagebücher 1898–1918 (Textkritische Neuedition)*, ed. Wolfgang Kersten (Stuttgart: Hatje Contz, 1988), #285.

60 Klee, *Briefe*, 1:163.

61 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #403. Although Klee's diary entry is dated 1902, we

have long known that, except for the diaries of the years 1916–18, his diary manuscripts are of a later date, copied and edited after no longer extant originals. Most of the entries in Klee's Italian diaries correspond to passages in the letters to his fiancée Lily Stumpf, and in those cases it seems likely that the views expressed do indeed date from that sojourn. But, interestingly, there is no corresponding passage for this entry in the letters to Lily. As Christian Geelhaar convincingly demonstrated, the definitive manuscript of the Italian journal could not have been concluded before 1914–15, at least half a decade before Klee began cultivating the look of age in his own works. See Christian Geelhaar, "Journal intime oder Autobiographie? Über Paul Klee's Tagebücher," in Paul Klee: *Das Frühwerk 1883–1922*, ed. Armin Zweite, exh. cat. (Munich: Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, 1979), 251.

62 Franz von Lenbach (1836–1904), one of Munich's "painter-princes," produced pictures that came from his easel already bathed in the golden brown tonality of Old Master paintings covered with dirty varnish.

63 Benjamin, *SW* 4, 338; *GS*, 1:646–47.

64 The essay was a fierce critique of a golygonoplastic facsimile of the Bamberg *Reiter*, a medieval stone sculpture from Bamberg Cathedral. Max Sauerlandt, "Der Bamberger Reiter—gefälscht," *Der Kreis* 6, no. 3 (Mar. 1929): 130–33. The entire controversy, with complete bibliographical citations, is discussed by Michael Diers, "Kunst und Reproduktion: Der Homburger Faksimile-Streit," *Idea: Jahrbuch der Hamburger Kunsthalle* 5 (1986): 124–37. Benjamin's surviving notes for the artwork essay, incomplete, are published in *GS*, 1:982–1063 and *GS*, 7:661–90. They contain no reference to any of these articles nor, for that matter, any reference to issues of material duration and authenticity.

65 Max Sauerlandt, "Original und 'Faksimile-Reproduktion,'" *Der Kreis* 6, no. 9 (Sept. 1929): 501, 502.

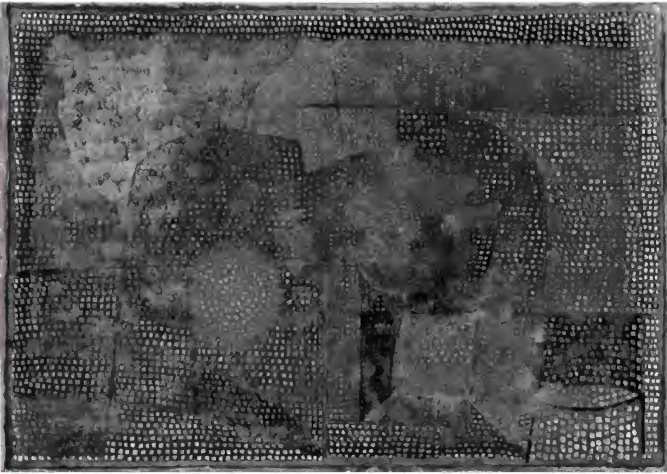


Fig. 6: Paul Klee, *Weathered Mosaic* [verwittertes Mosaik], 1933/39. Watercolor on Japanese wove paper, mounted on board, 34.5 x 45.4 cm, Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four Galka Scheyer Collection, Pasadena, CA.

of the unique artwork with its “mysterious, magical, biological ‘aura’”; merely to attempt to explain why these things cannot be falsified or reproduced amounted to “an offense against the sovereignty of art.”⁶⁶

The longest contribution was by Erwin Panofsky, then a professor at Hamburg University. In his article, also issued as a separate publication, we find ideas that are close to those that figured in Benjamin’s artwork essay.⁶⁷ Panofsky writes of the “unrepeatable organic uniqueness [unwiederholbare organische Einmaligkeit] of an artistic product.” Also strikingly close to Benjamin is Panofsky’s observation that “That which a reproduction, no matter how ‘successful,’ can never convey, and quite sensibly does not in the least wish to convey, is that unanalyzable ‘experience of authenticity [Echtheitserlebnis],’ which is a quite irreplaceable ingredient...of the aesthetic act that is consummated before the original.”⁶⁸ He further identified the “natural changes” the

work has undergone—patina, weathering (*Verwitterung*), the emergence of penitenti—with this experience of authenticity and conceded that for many modern viewers the pleasures associated with these qualities, which were independent of the artist’s intention, took precedence over the *Sinnerlebnis*, the experience of the work’s intended meaning.⁶⁹

Klee’s 1933 watercolor, *Weathered Mosaic* (verwittertes Mosaik; fig. 6), so aptly titled for this context, might well serve as the perfect illustration of Panofsky’s point. It belongs to a series of works in this style that Klee executed following a visit to Ravenna during the previous summer. In this work, evidently with the use of a sponge, he dampened and partially obscured his brilliant

tiles of color, simulating the muted glow of worn, darkened mosaics in the cool, stony interiors of ancient churches. Significantly, there is no representation here—there is only the ambiguous suggestion of a cross. This is a perfect illustration of Panofsky’s point of how the modern viewer values the *Verwitterung*, as a component of the *Echtheitserlebnis*, over the *Sinnerlebnis*. It could also serve to illustrate Benjamin’s association of the aura with the artwork’s origins in religious ritual. As he wrote, the work’s origin in religious ritual constitutes part of its aura, even if the ritual it now serves is a profane, purely aesthetic one.⁷⁰ It is no longer what this object represents, its identity as an image intended to nourish religious faith, that affects the beholder, but what the object has become: a relic of a remote tradition—ancient, mysterious, ritualistic, much like the statue of St. Peter that Klee had seen as a student in Rome. In his artwork essay Benjamin characterized the decay of aura as “the prying of the object from its shell”;⁷¹ in *Weathered Mosaic* it is this shell that becomes the primary object of aesthetic experience. Aura becomes content.

While the idea of the artwork as a living biological organism was a recurring topos in the Hamburg controversy, the other component of Benjamin’s definition, “changes in the circumstances of its [the artwork’s] ownership,” or provenance, was not, although that is certainly implicit in the *Echtheitserlebnis*.⁷² This aspect was,

66 Kurt Karl Eberlein, “Original und Faksimile-Reproduktion,” *Der Kreis* 6, no. 11 (Nov. 1929): 652. An English translation of the essay appears in Christopher Phillips, ed., *Photography in the Modern Era: European Documents and Critical Writings, 1913–1940* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Aperture, 1989), 148.

67 Erwin Panofsky, “Original und Faksimilereproduktion,” *Der Kreis* 7, no. 7 (July 1930): 3–16; English translation, “Original and Facsimile Reproduction,” trans. Timothy Grundy, *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, nos. 57/58 (Spring/Autumn 2010): 330–38. Benjamin had cited the 1923 Panofsky/Fritz Saxl monograph on Dürer’s *Melencolia I* in his *Habilitatsschrift, Der Ursprung des deutschen Traversierspiels*. He also included mention of his *Die Perspektive als symbolische Form* (1924–25) in his notes for the artwork essay (Benjamin, GS, 1:1049). Panofsky, who had been sent a pre-printing of part of Benjamin’s book by Hugo von Hofmannsthal, had responded negatively to it (GS, 1:910–11).

68 Panofsky, “Original und Faksimilereproduktion,” 1080–81. Translations from this article are my own.

69 *Ibid.*, 1087–88.

70 Benjamin, SW 3, 105; GS, 7:356.

71 *Ibid.*, 105; 7:355. Here I have substituted the more felicitous translation of this passage (*Die Entschlängelung des Gegenstandes aus seiner Hülle*) from Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 223.

72 See note 52.

however, prefigured in a text Benjamin published a few months before his photography essay, namely “Unpacking My Library: A Talk About Collecting.” A passage from this essay, which is ignored in most discussions of aura, offers a vivid example of auratic experience without naming it as such. He speaks of the “springtide of memories that surges toward any collector as he contemplates his possessions.” He need only take his books in his hands, Benjamin writes, and “he seems to be seeing through them into their distant past, as though inspired.” “The period, the region, the craftsmanship, the former ownership—for a true collector, the whole background of an object adds up to a magic encyclopedia whose quintessence is the fate of his object.”⁷³ For Benjamin it is not the fate of the text, of the reproducible literary work that he has in mind, but that of the particular, unique copy of the book that is in his possession, and “the most important fate of a copy is its encounter with him, with his own collection.” For this reason the true collector will not be content with a bibliophile reprint of the book. Although the term “aura” appears nowhere in this essay, what Benjamin describes here is marked by aura’s “strange weave of space and time,” by its temporal transparency. And what he here sums up as the object’s “fate” will be identified with the aura of the unique historical art object in his later artwork essay.

Both components of Benjamin’s characterization of the “here and now” of the artwork that he identified with aura—the physical changes produced by the work’s duration and the changes in provenance—are evoked in Klee’s *Arabian Bride* (*arabische Braut*) (1924; fig. 7), executed in watercolor with an oil glaze. The conspicuous, seemingly “natural” abrasions of its surface evoke the surface of old, worn vellum rather than betraying the purposive workings of an artist’s hand, and it is these conspicuous qualities that convey the sense that the work is not to be experienced so much as a representation of an Arabian bride but primarily as an exemplification of an artifact that represents her; it is above all the life of the *artifact*, not *her* life, that is here conjured up. Indeed, it is precisely the simulated damage to this mock portrait that suggests its estrangement from the matrix of values and functions that inspired its creation, thereby underlining its sense of remoteness—geographical, temporal, cultural—and intensifying the exotic effect of the image. For it is not merely the image—the “Arabian bride”—that seems foreign, but the object itself.

It is important to note that in this pictorial fiction Klee does not make any effort to reproduce the style of a particular Islamic pictorial tradition nor of any European orientalist painting. If the painting evokes anything in Islamic visual culture, apart from the veiled face, it is the patterning of a carpet, but here that patterning remains asymmetrical.⁷⁴ Klee does not quote, adapt, or suggest a historical style; we cannot associate this image with any

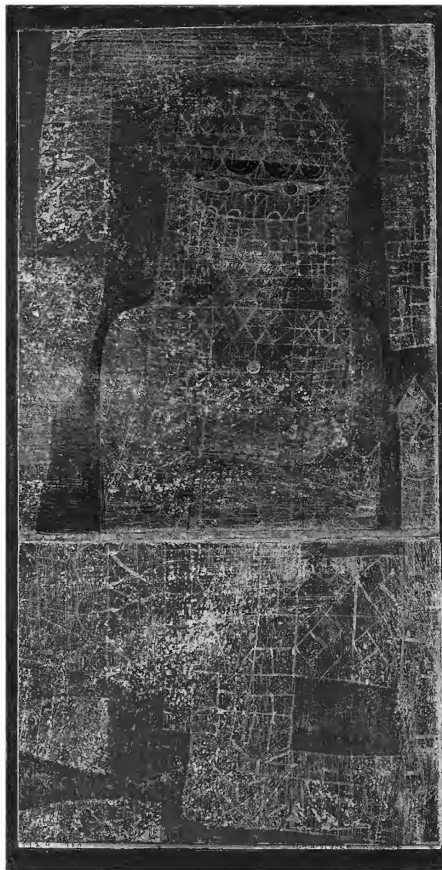


Fig. 7: Paul Klee, *Arabian Bride* (*arabische Braut*), 1924/1951. Watercolor and oil glaze on paper with gouache and ink border, on cardboard, 33.5 x 16.5 cm, Norton Simon Museum, The Blue Four Galka Scheyer Collection, Pasadena, CA.

specific moment in linear time. What we have here is a radically different mode of polytemporality than we find in nineteenth-century historicism or in the neoclassical and neorealist strains of Klee’s contemporaries, such as Picasso or Otto Dix, who evoke the past by means of style or, in Dix’s case, through medium as well.⁷⁵ In *Arabian Bride* Klee achieves his polytemporal “auratic”

73 Benjamin, *SW* 2, 487; *GS*, 4:388, 389. Several passages in the text are closely related to the section on “The Collector” [Convolute H] in Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, ed. and trans. Rolf Tiedemann (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 203–211.

74 On Klee’s relationship to Islamic visual culture see the richly illustrated Michael Baumgartner et al., *Auf der Suche nach dem Orient*/Paul Klee. *Tepich der Erinnerung*, exh. cat. [Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009].

75 On Picasso’s adaptation of historical styles see Elizabeth Cowling, *Picasso: Style and Meaning* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 390–451. For a sharply critical view, i.e., that Picasso had sold out “the modernist project,” see Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Picasso Papers* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998), 89–210. On Dix and tradition see Sylvie Lacoq-Ramond, ed., *Otto Dix et les maîtres anciens*, exh. cat. [Colmar: Musée d’Unterlinden, 1996].

effect not by stylistic anachronisms but by means of the picture's title and its simulated surface effects. This allows him to create works that are formally innovative even as they conjure up associations of pastness, and in this way he achieves a different, more complex affect. For it is not only pastness that is being thematized here but a particular aesthetic of reception: the modern encounter, in the age of art history and the museum, with artifacts that exemplify temporal and cultural otherness.

Let us now look more closely at how this relates to Benjamin's notion of aura as he defined it in the artwork essay. In the auratic work of art, he wrote, "uniqueness and duration" are tightly linked.⁷⁶ In the auratic experience of an object its "material duration" and "historical testimony" become subjectively present to the beholder in a *single moment*; one has a synchronic experience of its diachronic life, of its layered temporality—"a telescoping of the past through the present," as Benjamin phrased it in a note for his *Arcades Project*.⁷⁷ The synchronic experience results from this uniqueness, from the "here and now" of the artwork and our encounter with it in time and space; the diachronic, on the other hand, is our subjective awareness of the work's duration, "the history" to which it has been subjected, the "changes it has suffered in its physical structure over time, as well as any changes in the circumstances of its ownership." This auratic experience differs from Riegl's experience of material decay not only, as previously noted, in that it incorporates the history—but precisely through this "strange weave of space and time," of synchronic and diachronic. It is this experience that Klee evokes through artificial means—*artificial*, because in his works *aura* and *authenticity* are no longer identical, as they are for Benjamin; he has isolated the auratic experience from the actual duration, the actual history of the work. Consequently the auratic experience no longer relates to the actual work, rather the work conjures up memories of our experience of genuine objects.

I have thus far refrained from mentioning the crucial fact that in the artwork essay Benjamin welcomed, even celebrated, the ostensible decay of aura effected by the artwork's technological reproducibility, for he linked aura with "traditional concepts—such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery."⁷⁸ Once removed from its original ritual functions, he claimed, the work of art had been reduced to an object of useless aesthetic contemplation, which, "as the bourgeoisie degenerated, became a breeding ground for asocial behavior."⁷⁹ By destroying an artwork's aura through reproduction, one could deploy it for new uses: "the technology of reproduction detaches the reproduced object from the sphere of tradition.... And in permitting the reproduction to reach the recipient in his or her own situation, it actualizes that which is reproduced."⁸⁰ "For the first time in world history, technological reproducibility emancipates the work of art from its parasitic subservience to ritual." And "as soon as the cri-

terion of authenticity ceases to be applied to artistic production, the whole social function of art is revolutionized. Instead of being founded on ritual, it is based on a different practice: politics."⁸¹

Klee's simulation and staging of auratic effects, then, would seem to be directly at odds with Benjamin's position in his artwork essay. Indeed, earlier, in his "Little History of Photography" Benjamin had attacked the photographers of the late nineteenth century precisely for simulating, through retouching and other techniques, the "auratic" effects of the primitive photographs of the 1840s.⁸² Klee's art, by its simulation of such auratic effects, might be said to encourage that subjective reverie, that purposeless aesthetic contemplation which for Benjamin was characteristic of the degeneration of the bourgeoisie in its "asocial behavior." And indeed, in one of the few mature statements in which Klee spoke of the function of his art, he endorsed such "asocial behavior": "The picture," he told his students at the Düsseldorf Academy, "has no particular purpose. It is a thing without purpose, and it has only one goal, to make us happy. That is something very different than a connection to external life."⁸³ In his contribution to the anthology *Creative Credo*, published in 1920, he characterized art as a "holiday." It transported one into another world, whose diversions strengthened one for "the inevitable return to the grayness of the workday."⁸⁴ Klee clearly did not believe in the social agency of modern art. In that respect his work seems to embody "pure" art, which, to recall Benjamin's words, "rejects not only every social function but also every determination by subject matter."⁸⁵

Yet, ironically, Benjamin singled out Klee's art for what he perceived as its radical social agency, cheering it as a force for the destruction of aura and tradition. "One must have seen...Klee's *Angelus Novus* (who preferred to free men by taking from them, rather than make them happy by giving to them) to understand a humanity that proves itself by destruction."⁸⁶ In his fundamental essay, "Experience and Poverty" ("Erfahrung und Armut," 1933) Benjamin praised Klee among artists as a harbinger of a "new barbarism." Modernity, with its "tremendous development of technology," had produced a "force field of destructive torrents and explosions" and a rupture with the past, with that experience (*Erfahrung*) that linked one generation with another. This produced "a poverty of human experience in general," and with

81 *Ibid.*, 106; 7:356–57. This reads almost like an *ad hominem* riposte to Sauerlandt. He had been adamant: "We must say it again and again, that the productive powers of the artwork have died in reproduction" [original emphasis] [Sauerlandt, "Reproduktion," 504]. For Benjamin, on the contrary, it was reproduction that restored agency to the artwork.

82 Benjamin, *GS*, 2:377.

83 Petra Peltpiierre, *Aus der Malklasse von Paul Klee* (Bern: Benteli, 1957), 10.

84 Paul Klee, "Beitrag für den Sammelband 'Schöpferische Konfession,'" in *Schriften: Rezensionen und Aufsätze*, ed. Christian Geelhaar (Cologne: DuMont, 1976), 122.

85 Benjamin, *SW* 3, 106 [altered translation]; *GS*, 7:356.

86 Benjamin, "Karl Kraus" (1931), in *SW* 2, 433–58, 456; *GS*, 2:334–67, 367. For a useful discussion of this essay and Benjamin's interpretation of *Angelus Novus* see Beatrice Hansen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: Of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 114–26. See also the magisterial essay by O. K. Werckmeister, "Walter Benjamin, Paul Klee and der Engel der Geschichte," in *Versuche über Paul Klee* (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1981), 98–123.

76 Benjamin, *SW* 3, 105 [altered translation]; *GS*, 7:355.

77 Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 471, Convolute N7a, 3.

78 Benjamin, *SW* 3, 101; *GS*, 7:350.

79 *Ibid.*, 119; 7:379.

80 *Ibid.*, 104; 7:353.

it “a new, positive concept of barbarism. For what does poverty of experience do for the barbarian? It forces him to begin from scratch; to make a new start.” Klee—the sole painter that Benjamin names in the article, allying him with Bertolt Brecht, Adolph Loos, and Paul Scheerbart—has modeled himself on the engineer; his “figures seem to have been designed on the drawing board.” “A complex artist like the painter Paul Klee,” he continued, “and a programmatic one like Loos—both reject the traditional, solemn, noble image of man, festooned with all the sacrificial offerings of the past. They turn instead to the naked man of the contemporary world who lies screaming like a new born babe in the dirty diapers of the present.” Benjamin does not directly mention the destruction of aura with reference to Klee, but he does so implicitly by asserting his spiritual kinship with the architectural vision of Scheerbart and the buildings of Loos, Le Corbusier, and the Bauhaus: “Objects made of glass have no ‘aura’.... They have created rooms in which it is hard to leave traces.”⁸⁷

Here Benjamin presented a drastically reductive view of Klee as a radical artist-engineer, somewhat in the mold of a Russian constructivist, even as, in the last years of the Weimar Republic, most favorable German critics were emphasizing the enchanted, dreamlike poetry of his art.⁸⁸ One of the skeptics compared him to Whistler, “a fine and cultivated taste, but also an over-sophisticated one, somewhat ladylike and fragile.”⁸⁹ To be sure, one can see something of the engineer in the rigid constructive style of watercolors like *Agricultural Experimental Layout for Late Fall* (*Agricultur Versuchs anlage für den Spätherbst*) (1922; plate 6) or *Polyphonic Architecture* (*polyphone Architektur*) (1930; plate 62), which appear to have been drawn mostly with a compass and ruler. But what of the whimsy, the charm, the play? Poverty of experience? No other artist of his time touches on such a wealth of experience. Klee combined radical innovation and con-

tinual experimentation in form and technique with a dimension of memory—and in this way perhaps he is, in the end, closer to Benjamin than he might appear. For as John McCole has argued, “Benjamin’s work celebrates and mourns, by turns, the liquidation of tradition.” He “draws diverse and often apparently contradictory implications from the aura and its destruction.”⁹⁰

Klee may have had a similarly ambivalent view, looking nostalgically to a vanished past in which painting had a clearly defined function even as he relished the seemingly boundless freedom for artistic experimentation that modernity afforded, a freedom born of art’s marginality and social isolation. Already as a student in Rome, where, as we have seen, Klee had memorable experiences of what Benjamin would call “aura,” he sensed a rupture, a severing of the historical continuity between the past and the present. After immersing himself in Roman antiquity and the Renaissance, he confessed that he was “unable to imagine any artistic relationship to our own time. And to create something anachronistic appears suspect to me.”⁹¹ But the real turning point was the war: “Now is the transition between yesterday and today,” Klee wrote in his diary. “In the vast pit of forms lies rubble, to which one is still partly attached. This provides material for abstraction.” And in the next entry: “Only in my memories do I still linger in that shattered world. As one occasionally reminisces. Thus am I ‘abstract with memories.’”⁹²

PARODY

J’ai plus de souvenirs que si j’avais mille ans.

—Charles Baudelaire⁹³

“Abstract with memories” concisely summarizes Klee’s mature art, with its radically modernist formal practices deployed in pictures that nevertheless recall humanity’s pictorial past. It is to a brilliant, unjustly overlooked essay by Clement Greenberg that we owe this insight:

The primacy of its formal virtues does not prevent Klee’s art from also being intensely pictorial—a quality that belongs to its epiphenomenal content, as it were, and consists in the parodying of “literary” and pictorial art

87 Benjamin, *SW* 2, 731–36, here 732, 733, 734; *GS*, 2:213–19, here 215, 216, 217. Benjamin was not the only author to interpret Klee as a deeply radical artist. If Benjamin welcomed in Klee the spirit of a “new barbarism,” Carl Einstein saw his art as a force for a “primitivization” that swept aside an “all too sophisticated civilization.” “What is now at stake is no longer the prelude to a destruction of things, but the rebuilding of the structure of the psyche, whence new figurations bore their way into reality. Art no longer means unrestrained self expression, it can be something deeper: the suicide and the destruction of man as he is in favor of new and possible formations” [Carl Einstein, *Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Uwe Fleckner and Thomas Gaehgtens (1931; Berlin: Fannei und Walz, 1996), 268]. On Einstein and Klee see my “Die erheblichste Persönlichkeit unter den deutschen Künstlern: Einstein über Klee,” in *Die visuelle Wende der Moderne: Carl Einstein’s Die Kunst des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Klaus H. Krieger (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2003), 131–46; Sebastian Zeidler, “Form as Revolt: Carl Einstein’s Philosophy of the Real and the Work of Paul Klee,” *Res: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, nos. 57/58 (Spring/Autumn 2010): 229–63.

88 For example, Willi Wolfradt, “Paul Klee,” *Der Cicerone* 21, no. 21 (1929): 619; Ludwig Justi, *Von Corinth Bis Klee* (Berlin: Julius Bard, 1931), 193–98; Paul Westheim, “Der Händlerin der Malerei,” in *Helden und Abenteuer: Welt und Leben der Künstler* (Berlin: Hermann Reckendorf, 1931), 224–27.

89 Karl Scheffler, “Paul Klee,” *Kunst und Künstler* 28, no. 3 (1929): 112. Rudolf Arnheim, whose *Film als Kunst* (1931) was a major source for Benjamin’s artwork essay, mocked Klee’s art as *Kinderei*, child’s play. Klee, Arnheim asserted, enjoyed success on the market because his art satisfied the needs of a bourgeoisie that, “in coquettish contempt for everything intellectual and problematic,” found in it an antidote to “the horrors” of the times. Rudolf Arnheim, “Klee für Kinder,” *Die Weltbühne* 26, no. 5 (Jan. 26, 1930): 171, 173.

90 John McCole, *Walter Benjamin and the Antinomies of Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 8.

91 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #294 (Nov. 1901). Since Benjamin identified aura with an experience of continuity (*Erfahrung*), Klee’s sense of historical rupture may seem a contradiction. Yet as Benjamin said of the collector, “Only in the process of extinction is the collector understood” [*SW* 2, 492 (altered translation); *GS*, 4:395]. On Klee’s developing sense of history during his Italian sojourn see my *Paul Klee: The Formative Years* (New York: Garland, 1981), 49–90.

92 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #951, #952. O. K. Werckmeister has explored the parallels between this imagery and Benjamin’s interpretation of Klee’s *Angelus Novus* in “On the Concept of History” [Werckmeister, “Walter Benjamin,” 98–104].

93 Charles Baudelaire, “Spleen 2,” in *Les Fleurs du mal* (Paris: Poulet-Malassis, 1857).



Fig. 8: Paul Klee, *Inscription (Inschrift)*, 1926/17. Watercolor and ink on paper mounted on cardboard, 31.1 x 14.6 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY.

in general. No longer taking the pictorial for granted but seeing it as one cultural convention among others, Klee isolates its distinguishing properties in order to burlesque them.... The pictorial in Klee's notion of it comprises every system of making marks on a surface that mankind has ever used for the purpose of communication: ideographs, diagrams, hieroglyphs, alphabets, handwriting, blueprints, musical notation, charts, maps, tables, etc., etc. All these he includes in his parody. And then more, much more. For the parody of the pictorial is but a core around which he wraps layer on layer of a parody that aims at all commonly held verities, all current sentiments, messages, attitudes, convictions, methods, procedures, formalities, etc., etc.⁹⁴

94 Clement Greenberg, "An Essay on Paul Klee" (1950), in *The Collected Essays and Criticism, Volume 3: Affirmations and Refusals*, 1950–56, ed.

And among the layers, Greenberg might have added, is a parody of the very traces of the pastness of the artwork, of its survival through history, evoking the beholder's subjective response before such an object.

Inscription (Inschrift), a watercolor of 1926 (fig. 8), is a rich example of such an auratic encounter and demonstrates the breadth of the "pictorial" targets to which Greenberg refers—in this case script. We are presented with a parody of some ancient, indecipherable textual fragment, in which Klee, with his delicately mottled brownish washes, has simulated the effect of aged paper, complete with foxing that speckles its surface. The inscription remains mysterious, indecipherable, incomprehensible. It is thus not what the inscription signifies, related to the manuscript's original function and the intention of its ostensible maker, that constitutes its interest for the beholder. What attracts us is the sheet's afterlife, its survival through history, its status as a mysterious object estranged from its original meaning and function through which it becomes an object of aesthetic contemplation. It is that experience that is thematized here. As in the later *Weathered Mosaic*, aura trumps meaning. All of this, of course, is a fiction, for the watercolor has no such history, and the viewer knows it. But as with *Weathered Mosaic* and *Arabian Bride*, the work conjures up a subjective mood in the beholder such as we might experience in the presence of authentic artifacts from remote cultures.

In effecting such responses in the beholder, Klee reproduces—more precisely, he *simulates*—an important feature of modern aesthetic experience, one that has its primary locus in the museum. For these works exemplify not merely physical duration but *cultural transience and otherness*; they evoke our experience of works of art that—removed from their original sites, estranged from their original functions and their concomitant codes and rituals—lead an afterlife as merely aesthetic objects.⁹⁵

Until recently parody has been widely understood as a genre in which one work mockingly imitates another work. Thanks to the work of Linda Hutcheon and Margaret Rose we have gained a broader, more flexible understanding of this form.⁹⁶ Recalling the original Greek meaning of the word, Rose treats parody as

John O'Brian [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993], 12–13.

95 The Klee admirer Carl Einstein eloquently described the fate of such objects: "An altarpiece, a portrait are executed for a specific purpose, for specific surroundings; removed from that milieu the work is only a dead fragment, ripped from the soil; just as if one broke a mullion out of a window or a capital from a column—probably the building itself was already in ruins. And yet one aspect of the object now becomes isolated: the aesthetic phenomenon—from that very moment the effect of the art object is constrained and falsified. The altar panel is dead without prayer; weak natures attempt, in their suave aestheticism, to conjure from it some kind of vague religiosity: a poetic mood is supposed to supplant the great, specific, vital condition of the work's origins" [Carl Einstein, "Das Berliner Völkerkunde-Museum: Anlässlich der Neuordnung," in *Werke, Band 2, 1919–1928*, ed. Hermann Hoermann and Klaus Siebenhaar [Berlin: Fannei and Walz, 1996], 446).

96 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth-Century Art Forms*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); Margaret A. Rose, *Parody: Ancient, Modern, and Post-Modern* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Rose has subsequently studied the forms of visual parody in her *Pictorial Irony, Parody, and Pastiche: Comic Intertextuality in the Arts of the 19th and 20th Centuries* (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2011). She does not consider Klee in this study.

a special form of imitation. Παρῳδός (parodos) is the name one gave to a singer who imitated another; παρῳδή (parode) was a song sung in imitation of another song.⁹⁷ If one is true to this original sense of the word, parody need not be marked by a spirit of mockery toward its object, as it is usually understood.⁹⁸ According to Rose, it is not mockery or ridicule but humor that is essential to parody, along with the element of metafiction or “double coding,” namely the imitation of codes and conventions of another work of art. To be sure, parody may be motivated by scorn, but it may also spring from an attitude of sympathy, even of admiration for the parodied original. Hutcheon proposes that at times parody may be “less an aggressive than a conciliatory rhetorical strategy.”⁹⁹ Greenberg would have agreed. For him, Klee’s parody is never bitter, never subversive. “Far from being a protest against the world as it is, his art is an attempt to make himself more comfortable in it; first he rejects it, then, when it has been rendered harmless by negation, he takes it fondly back.”¹⁰⁰

Visual parody is almost exclusively understood as targeting a specific artwork or artist.¹⁰¹ Klee’s practice differs in that its object is almost never a specific work or style but, in the examples we have been looking at, a generic type of artifact and, in some cases, a traditional pictorial genre. To be sure, the number of Klee’s “auratic” parodies is comparatively small—I have identified approximately one hundred—relative to his vast oeuvre of over nine thousand works. Yet, if one uses Margaret Rose’s two criteria, of humor and double coding, much of Klee’s art can be classified as parody. As with his “auratic” pictures, Klee’s landscapes, portraits, and still lifes are usually no more than parodies of such subjects, pictures that awaken our memories of other, genuine examples of these genres. Most of Klee’s “portraits,” for example, are not really portraits at all, but freely invented, strongly physiognomic configurations that parody the conventions of portraiture.¹⁰² There are two hundred works of this kind, in various media, that either include the word *Bildnis*, “portrait,” in their titles and/or have proper names or initials attached to them, that yet are not portraits at all as we normally understand that

term. As Richard Brilliant concisely defined it, “portraits are art works intentionally made of living or once living people by artists”; Klee’s “sitters” however, are entirely fictive.¹⁰³ We find the same thing in many of his “landscapes,” abstract compositions to which a fictive proper name or initials are attached to give them the specificity of an actual site: *The L-Platz under Construction* [*Der L-Platz im Bau*; 1923],¹⁰⁴ *Clouds over BOR* [*Gewölke über BOR*; 1928],¹⁰⁵ and *N. H. D* [*Province En-Aitch-Dee*] [*N. H. D. [provinz enhade]*] (1932; plate 64) are examples. The majority of Klee’s figurative works are representations—more precisely, exemplifications—of representations; they only play at being the pictures which their titles claim them to be. Seen in this way, much of Klee’s oeuvre becomes a grand, but humorous, sometimes scurrilous, retrospective of all the historical functions of painting: hieroglyphs, cult images, saints, gods, images, landscapes, still lifes—all genres and functions are represented, in the general spirit of parody that Greenberg first identified. Here, too, although there may be no simulation of the traces of age, there is an auratic dimension. Referring to speech acts, Mikhail Bakhtin argued that every human utterance has diachronic as well as synchronic dimensions; words may have no memory, but types of utterance do: “each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances” of its genre, and “always responds to a greater or lesser degree to them.” “A genre lives in the present,” writes Bakhtin, “but always remembers its past, its beginnings.”¹⁰⁶ This is no less true of the genres of visual art, and of the parodied genre as well.

Klee’s practice in all of his parodies can perhaps be understood as his response to a historical situation in which the traditional representational functions of painting had, as his Bauhaus colleague László Moholy-Nagy declared, been rendered obsolete by the newer, rapidly expanding medium of photography.¹⁰⁷ For the practice of representation was historically linked to certain social and religious functions of painting, indeed these functions demanded representation; where these functions were no longer operative, pictorial representation itself had lost its purpose. Accordingly, Klee’s art is ultimately not only a parody of genres but also of the representational function of painting itself. He inscribes representation within abstraction, and in so doing inscribes the past of painting into a modernist, abstract, non-mimetic present—not in the sense of a continuation of tradition but rather as a *recollection* of it. As such it fits Linda Hutcheon’s concise formulation of the work of parody, namely, “that by its very double structure, [it] is very much an inscription of the past in the present, and it is for this reason that it can be said to embody

97 Rose, *Parody*, 7–8. Rose’s etymological discussion is indebted to an article by Fred W. Householder, Jr., “ΠΑΡῳΔΙΑ,” *Classical Philology* 39, no. 1 (Jan. 1944): 1–9. The use of the term in music, for example with reference to the compositional practice of J. S. Bach and G. F. Handel, who used their own previously composed music to set texts for which it was not originally intended, is closer to the positive associations of the original Greek meaning. Bach’s *Mass* in B Minor and his *Christmas Oratorio*, which consist of many numbers adapted from music previously written for his sacred or secular cantatas, offer abundant examples of this practice. See Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (London: J. M. Dent, 1983), 163–72.

98 Rose, *Parody*, 45–46.

99 Hutcheon, *Parody*, xiv.

100 Greenberg, “Paul Klee,” 13.

101 This is how Margaret Rose treats it in her *Pictorial Irony*, 5–51.

102 There is a rich variety of examples; here I mention only a few: *Baroque Portrait* (*Barockbildnis*, 1920); *Portrait of an Expressionist* (*Bildnis eines Expressionisten*, 1922); *Berta* (1924); *Mrs. P. in the South* (*Frau P. im Süden*, 1924); *Little Girl-Portrait in Yellow* (*W Mädchen Bildnis in Gelb*, 1925); *Portrait of a Madman* (*Bildnis eines Wahnsinnigen*, 1925); *Mr. Pep and his Horse* (*Mr. Pep und sein Pferd*, 1925); *Mr. Pearlsvine* (*Monsieur Perlenschnur*, 1925); “*Claudio*” (1927); “*Charli*” (1927); *Portrait of Mrs. Gl.* (*Bildnis Frau Gl.*, 1929); and *J.*, *As He Was Still a Child* (*J., noch Kind*, 1933). For illustrations of these and other examples, see Helfenstein and Rümelin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, vols. 3–6.

103 Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 8.

104 Helfenstein and Rümelin, *Catalogue Raisonné*, 4:40, #3104; col. illus., 61.

105 *Ibid.*, 5:247, #4697.

106 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky’s Poetics*, trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 106; Mikhail Bakhtin, “The Problem of Speech Genres,” in *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 91.

107 László Moholy-Nagy, *Painting, Photography, Film*, trans. Janet Seligman (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1969), 15.

and bring to life actual historical tensions."¹⁰⁸

76

For Walter Benjamin aura was synonymous with continuity of experience, which he termed *Erfahrung*. "Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine with material of the collective past. Rituals with their ceremonies, their festivals,...kept producing the amalgamation of these two elements of memory over and over again. They triggered recollection at certain times and remained available to memory throughout people's lives."¹⁰⁹ Precisely such experience, like aura itself, Benjamin believed, had atrophied in the face of the shocks, discontinuity, and cultural fragmentation of modernity—what he called *Erlebnis*. In the work of Marcel Proust, Benjamin saw an example of the prodigious effort required of a modern artist to achieve that sense of *Erfahrung*: "*À la recherche du temps perdu*," he wrote, "may be regarded as an attempt to produce experience synthetically...under today's conditions, for there is less and less hope that it will come into being naturally."¹¹⁰ It is tempting to see Klee's parodic art in similar terms. Combining parodic allusion to the representational genres of past art with indisputably modernist formal means that broke with the tradition of Western painting, he created works in which "the what-has-been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."¹¹¹ In this sense Klee was indeed "abstract with memories." ■

108 Hutcheon, *Parody*, xii.

109 Benjamin, *SW* 4, 316; *GS*, 1-611.

110 *Ibid.*, 315; 1-610.

111 Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 462, Convolute N2a, 3 (altered translation); *GS*, 5:576. Benjamin is defining what he calls the "dialectical image," a relation to the past that is not purely temporal nor characterized by continuity, but dialectical, an image that is "not archaic."

María del Rosario Acosta

Framing Klee's Window

You who separate and attract,
changing like the oceans—
sudden reflection, where our face contemplates itself
mingling with what is seen on the other side;

sample of a compromised freedom,
for destiny is present;
taken by the one among us which tempers
the outside's great excess.

—Rainer Maria Rilke¹

A window: the symbol of an opening gaze. A *threshold* that points out, in the distance that it frames, an impossible landscape. As it separates and attracts simultaneously, a window is but a mirror that barely lets us glimpse at the other—inaccessible—side of what we wish to see. Whoever were to tell its history would recall the history of this impossibility: the history of a gaze that, going beyond itself, finds itself at the end, as in Rilke's poem, halfway between the window and the mirror, between transparency and reflection.

This might be the destiny of Alberti's window: it opens up the history of painting in the Renaissance and, since then, inaugurates art's path as *re-presentation*. Understood as an *open window*, painting frames the world it wants to bring back by definitively separating the inside from the outside. The work of art's claim for transparency bears witness to its own opacity: the window would have always only been the mirror that, broken into fragments—as in some of Magritte's works (see, for example, *Key to the Fields*, 1933)—reveals the paradox of all representation: that it is only possible when that which seeks representation is sacrificed. Therefore, the world that opens up is already a lost world.

Yet this is not the secret that lies behind Rilke's window: a gaze which, going beyond itself, makes space explode allowing our finiteness to be penetrated, for an instant, by "the outside's great excess." As in those *fragments of the world*, which are the works of art according to Klee, these window panes do not frame or delimit, they do not lead anywhere; they already are that place where everything happens. In between the window and the mirror, Klee's work displaces all metaphors: what is visible in itself takes off before our eyes in an everlasting uncompleted movement whose nature is to be created continually, unfolding itself as we look at it. Thus, can works of art still be viewed as and through the window?

¹ *Tai qui sépare et qui attire, / changeante comme la mer, / glace, soudain, où notre figure se mire / mêlée à ce qu'on voit à travers; / échantillon d'une liberté compromise / par la présence du sort; / prise par laquelle parmi nous s'égalise / le grand trop du dehors* (Rainer Maria Rilke, "Les Fenêtres 4," in *Poemas franceses*, trans. Tomás Segovia [Valencia: Pre-textos, 1997]).

Surely they are not (or at least not only) Alberti's window: "I inscribe a quadrangle of right angles, as large as I wish, which is considered to be an open window through which I see what I want to paint."² The window's transparency allows the work of art to reflect, within its own frame, the reality that has been left outside, separated, waiting to be represented, described, and interpreted in the painting. Nature speaks through the window; as a result, its language is translated to the known idiom of representation. This is, as Klee acknowledges, the heritage carried out by works of art: a tradition in which it is necessary to move, in any case, if painting's most valuable aspect is not to be sacrificed: "a clear view of history should save us from desperately searching for novelty at the cost of naturalness."³

We are still shadowed by the past that the modern painter must learn to dwell in. "Today is a transition from yesterday,"⁴ writes Klee, and "to be new as against yesterday, is still revolutionary even if it does not shake the immense old world."⁵ The idea is not to invert the whole history of art and start anew, Klee remarks, but rather to try introducing new realities, "realities of art, realities that make of life something more than, on average, it appears to be."⁶ Something more than it appears to be, he says, and yet, that which appears in the polyphony of colors and forms, of spatial and temporal dimensions that are his works, could never be simply understood as a continuation of the pursuit of representing reality. Fidelity to nature, a wish hidden behind Alberti's window, is also carried out through the history Klee wishes to continue. Only this time, nonetheless, beginning with a displacement which, inside the metaphor, makes it explode into thousands of "impure crystals" that symbolize, for Klee, the works of art of the present.⁷

Hence, in his essay "On Modern Art," Klee lets us know that modern artists must learn to get rid of the restrictions that they are compelled to follow when nature is only understood as "culminating forms." The modern artist "does not feel so bound by these realities, because he does not see in these culminating forms the essence of the creative process of nature"⁸ (see *Group in Motion* [bewegte Gruppe], 1930; plate 24). To be detached from these forms, as ends in themselves, might be the only way to be truly loyal to such nature. Fidelity, thus, beyond and outside representation. Fidelity to what is visible, but no longer in the narrow sense of representing what is seen; it requires the gaze to expand and intensify. The issue is to remain and go beyond Alberti's window;

to (re)present the paradox of all representation. This is the only way in which all the possibilities of appearance may be opened: this is the quest Klee's work has set out to accomplish. The concern here is not, then, to free art from metaphors, but to summon them into movement, in behalf of discovering, from the inside, their hidden treasure.

Consequently, if Alberti's window conjures the artistic creed of a historical period as the representation and reproduction of what is visible, Klee's sense of appearance must lead in another direction. Alberti considers painting's dominion to be framed by a visible range, by what strictly appears before our eyes: "No one would deny that the painter has nothing to do with things that are not visible. The painter is concerned solely with representing what he can see."⁹ However, even though Klee is also concerned with what we can see, the relation between the artist and what is visible is radically transformed:

Yesterday's artistic creed and the related study of nature consisted, it seems safe to say, in a painfully precise investigation of appearance. I and you, the artist and his object, sought to establish optical-physical relations across the invisible barrier between the "I" and the "you." In this way, excellent pictures were obtained of the object's surface filtered by the air; the art of optical art was developed, while the art of contemplating unoptical impressions and representations and of making them visible was neglected. Yet, the investigation of appearance should not be neglected; it ought merely to be amplified.... The artist of today is more than an improved camera: he is more complex, richer and wider.¹⁰

Unlike Alberti's window—understood as a metaphor of representation—the modern artist is not constrained by the visible, since art makes visible. Thus, confronted by yesterday's artistic creed, Klee proposes his own "creative credo": "Art does not reproduce the visible, but makes visible."¹¹ Therefore, the issue is no longer about limiting painting's possibilities to the range of what is visible, but rather about expanding the possibilities of what is visible through painting. Instead of bringing back what has already been created, art continues creating the world.¹² A work of art is a window: a window facing a world that is only possible through art.

If reproducing what is visible always implies a distant relation of separation—of opacity, we said earlier, of loss and sacrifice—between the presence of the object and its representation, between the "I" and the "you," Klee writes, the modern artist, on the other hand, expects to restore continuity between nature and art: "there are other ways of looking into the object...which

2 Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, trans. John R. Spencer (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966), 183.

3 Paul Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," in *Notebooks, Volume 1: The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: George Wittenborn, 1961), 63.

4 Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), #951.

5 Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," 63.

6 Paul Klee, "On Modern Art," (in this volume) 14.

7 Klee, *Diaries*, #951.

8 Klee, "On Modern Art," 13.

9 Alberti, *On Painting*, 43.

10 Klee, "Creative Credo," in *The Thinking Eye*, 76.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," 67.

create, between the I and the object, a resonance surpassing all optical foundations."¹³ The modern artist seeks the window's presence by breaking the boundaries of representation. "By yearning to free ourselves from earthly bonds...we free ourselves from constraint in pure mobility."¹⁴ Thus, if art continues creating nature, a non-stopping creation that is in itself pure mobility, it has stopped speaking about nature (as if it were telling a story) and now speaks with nature: "for the artist, dialogue with nature remains a *conditio sine qua non*."¹⁵ This is its activity; this is its becoming present as a work of art. It dialogues with nature to transform it over and over again as we gaze at it. Art, says Klee, is "nature's altered image."¹⁶

What does this "alteration" involve? What kind of nature is altered as it becomes present in art? If what is at stake here is not only the alteration but also the expansion of a gaze, we might have to reformulate these questions and rather ask: Of what nature is this nature that can only be seen through art? Well, according to Klee, a work of art is capable of speaking with what is not seen by our eyes; with those "unoptical impressions" that will be made visible, for the first time, by the artist's creative capacity.

Regarding the dialogue with nature, the artist, says Klee, takes a "modest position," he is a mediator: "He neither serves nor rules, but merely mediates"; beauty "has merely passed through him."¹⁷ He is thus the trunk of the tree through which the juices flow from the roots up to the crown: "moved and compelled by the power of those streaming juices, he conducts what he is looking at into the work"¹⁸ (see *Little Tree [Bäumchen]*, 1935; plate 9). Nonetheless, what the artist has seen is not something that can simply be represented, copied, and retransmitted in the work of art that is the tree's crown: "It would not occur to anyone to demand of the tree that it shape its crown exactly like its root structure. Everyone will understand that the below and the above cannot mirror one another perfectly."¹⁹ What the artist has seen drives the elements of nature to be born again through art,²⁰ to displace and leave "their well-appointed sites, so that...they may elevate themselves to a new order."²¹

What the artist has seen is not limited namely to what is "visible"; moreover, it speaks to us and is capable of "making visible" what has been seen in secret: "the womb of nature, in the primal ground of Creation, which holds the secret key to everything that is."²² The artist is capable, therefore, of making visible what makes the visible possible: the ground of visibility itself (see *To Make Visible [sichtbar machen]*, 1926; plate 59).

This is precisely the expansion of visibility; this is just what is involved in fidelity toward nature. A kind of nature, therefore,

that is transformed while presented—and never represented—always uneasily trying to hide, to make itself secret: "the object grows beyond its appearance through our knowledge of its inner being, through the knowledge that the thing is more than its outward aspect suggests."²³ Speaking with nature, being loyal to it through works of art, is "not in the direction of fidelity to a nature that is under scientific control," but rather, writes Klee, the kind of fidelity that can only grow out of freedom.²⁴ A kind of freedom, he proceeds, related to having dared make a way into nature's womb, to having learned "to be as mobile as grand nature itself is mobile."²⁵ Following these thoughts, Klee declares, "the present stage of the world of appearances, the one that happens to meet [the artist's] eye," is "all-too-limited in contrast to the world of which he has caught a glimpse that runs deeper, the world he has felt in a more animated way."²⁶ To honor this nature, that continues its process of creation through art, is to allow the work of art to open up to the ever-changing presentation of what is made visible and, furthermore, of the making visible itself.

This is the work of art's only truth. This and only this one, says Klee, is the truth of its mirror (see *Absorption [Versunkenheit]*, 1919; plate 41):

There are some who will not be able to acknowledge the truth of my mirror. They should bear in mind that I am not here to reflect the surface (a photographic plate can do that) but must look within. I reflect the innermost heart. I write the words on the forehead and around the corners of the mouth. My human faces are truer than real ones. If I were to paint a really truthful self-portrait, you would see an odd Shell. Inside it, as everyone should be made to understand, would be myself, like the kernel in a nut. Such a work might also be called an allegory of crust formation.²⁷

The same year Klee publishes his "Creative Credo," Rilke writes the following in one of his letters:

Who would once write the history of the window, this wonderful framing of our everyday existence—perhaps within its most proper measure—a window continually filled by an over-flowing creation; that is all we have of the world.... Yet the window places us in relation, and measures our correspondence to what has yet to come in the very instant that

13 *Ibid.*, 66.

14 *Ibid.*, 67.

15 *Ibid.*, 63.

16 Klee, "On Modern Art," 10.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Ibid.*

20 *Ibid.*, 11.

21 *Ibid.*, 12.

22 *Ibid.*, 14.

23 Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," 66.

24 Klee, "On Modern Art," 14.

25 *Ibid.*

26 *Ibid.*, 13–14.

27 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 20.

Here the window does not only appear as space going beyond itself to encounter infinity, but also as an opening in time instantly inaugurated by space. If, as it has been taken under consideration, Klee's work assumes that this window's spatial explosion is the place where we encounter the primordial, the archetype, the origin of all origins and, therefore, the ground of visibility itself, Rilke's second suggestion will now allow us to look at Klee's work as an instance of a different temporality: as a threshold facing a future that art makes present; as something yet to come, says Rilke, that is announced by the limits that are framed by the window itself. The window is not, thus, a bridge leading to representation. Its opening can no longer be understood as a passage to a world "outside" whose presence before our eyes ought to be taken as a promise to be fulfilled. What this is about is a world (a time) inaugurated in the very instant the work of art occurs; in the occurrence of space constituted by an act of circumscription, of limitation. Time and space exchange places so the occurrence, which is, according to Klee, the work of art's truth, can take place/time: "for space itself is a temporal concept."²⁹

This is the way the work of art behaves according to Klee. A work of art, he says, is a "shelter for movement."³⁰ However, it is only inside the limits that circumscribe it, and only because of them, that it can be boundless: opening inside toward infinite movement, always protected by that which takes it in as presence:

The interior is infinite, in its absoluteness and in its most proper mystery, the loaded dot, the absolute sum of infinity. Comparison with nature: the seed. The exterior is finite; hence, it is the end of dynamic forces, the limit of its effects.³¹

As a seed, the work of art contains within itself all the possibilities of what is yet to be, of what is to come, to become; it announces the future Rilke speaks about in his letter. It is an unfinished process that, nonetheless, is only made possible because of its own limitation, the "finite exterior" that contains it: the window's frame, perhaps, or the window's—framed—appearance as an instant in space: "As projection the work of art is 'forever starting' and 'forever limited.'"³²

Works of art, Rilke wrote elsewhere, are different from other things in the world because they are things from the future, things whose time has not yet arrived. That is why they are windows facing the future, facing what the artist perceives is still to come. In a passage that refers tacitly to Aristotle's classic notion of art as developed in his *Poetics*, Klee writes: "I do not really want to render the human being as he is, but rather in the way he might be."³³ The artist cares for the possibilities of appearance, for their permanent movement and passage in time, "back there forward to the here and now."³⁴ This is what Klee considers to be true nature. And in honor of its infinite mobility—the artist, like the poet, behaves as a "philosopher"; "He says to himself, restricting himself to this world":

Our world once upon a time looked different, and it will look different again. And, leaning toward the Beyond, he opines: On other stars things may have assumed very different forms. Such mobility on the paths of natural Creation is a good school of formation for him. It allows one who creates to move from the ground upward, and, being himself mobile, he will be careful to let freedom prevail in the development of his paths of configuration.³⁵

Continuing the creation of the world while expanding visibility does not only imply an expansion of space but also of time. This expansion wanders along the path Klee calls *genesis*; the "womb of nature," the mystery of creation that lies before the eyes of whoever has a sufficiently penetrating gaze to see it. This is the only thing the artist "reproduces"—if the matter here is still about *reproducing*—in the work of art; it is the only thing that may be presented pictorially: "Creation lives as *genesis* under the visible surface of the work. All those touched by the spirit see this in retrospective, but only the creative see it looking forward (into the future)."³⁶

Consequently, Klee considers the work of art's appearance to be a window that is, in itself, an opening: not a passage, and much less a mirror—although it does share something with both of these—but rather a shelter: care and presence, production and reproduction of *genesis*. The image presented in such a work of art, which is grasped by the artist, is, as he recalls, "the image of

28 Letter from Rilke to Nanny Wunderly-Volkart, Aug. 27, 1920 (Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe: Volume 1* [Frankfurt: Schweizerischen Landesbibliothek, 1977], 315). I must thank Antonia Egel for sharing the correct reference of this quote with me, and for her help translating it into English.

29 Klee, "Creative Credo," 78.

30 Paul Klee, *Notebooks, Volume 2: The Nature of Nature*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Heinz Norden (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 47.

31 *Ibid.*, 49.

32 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 59. Although it is not the present essay's purpose, one may identify close connections between Klee's position and Gadamer's stand and critique in relation to certain modern tendencies of interpreting art. Valéry's position, for instance—which has echoed throughout twentieth-century theorists and artists—runs the risk, according to Gadamer, of falling

into an "untenable hermeneutic nihilism" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall [London: Continuum, 2004], 82), precisely because it does not limit in any way the possibilities of interpretation. Klee, on the other hand, considers that only within these limits—opened in and by the work of art itself—an infinite, unfinished movement appears before the spectator. I think this might stand near Gadamer's notion of *play* (*spiel*): an opening of possibilities, "an encounter with an unfinished event" (*Truth and Method*, 85) that always takes place in space, in a place already determined beforehand by the work of art itself (thus, the game has priority over the player) (*Truth and Method*, 102ff.).

33 Klee, "On Modern Art," 14.

34 *Ibid.*, 13.

35 *Ibid.*

36 Monday, July 3, 1922 in Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 463.

Creation as Genesis, for him the sole essential image.³⁷ He takes this up again in his "Creative Credo": "The work of art is first of all genesis; it is never experienced purely as a result."³⁸ "It is something I won't get tired of repeating,"³⁹ he writes, once again, in his notes to the Bauhaus: "a work is not primarily a product; it is first and foremost genesis, work in progress."⁴⁰

This is why it is most necessary to speak about formation [*Gestaltung*] rather than of form [*Gestalt*]:

Form as phenomenon is a dangerous chimera.
Form as movement, as action, is a good thing,
active form is good. Form as rest, as end, is
bad. Passive, finished form is bad. Formation
is good. Form is bad. Form is the end, death.
Formation is movement, act. Formation is life.⁴¹

If the work of art is compelled to (re)produce nature before our eyes, what is produced is precisely the irrepresentable: continuous, unfinished, and never satisfied creation that can only show itself, says Klee, "symbolically"; that is, as something "poetic and not literary...as though a certain diffidence stopped it from putting things the way they are."⁴² The language of genesis, of works of art, that moves spatially and temporally, and whose proper paths, Klee regards, one could not so surely point toward through words⁴³ is the language of "the single living word that wakes."⁴⁴ When spoken, it cares for all the "many gaps which must be present in the word, at least implicitly."⁴⁵ Therefore, the "truly creative person works with the lapidary quality of language."⁴⁶ As with poetic language, works of art must also be lapidary: each one must be itself in order to make visible everything that hides under its presence (see *Flight [Flucht]*, 1940; plate 25 and *Emigrating [auswandern]*, 1933; plate 54). A work of art is its past and its future, therefore, it is—as Rilke's window—constituted instantly by space and time. It reveals its concealing nature; it makes visible the paradox of its opening.

The notions of art and nature—or, more precisely, of nature in art, of art as the continuation of nature's creation—recall the Greek idea of *physis*, expressed in Heraclitus's famous sentence used by Heidegger, quoting Dürero, at the beginning of his essay on the work of art: *physis kriphestai philei*, "nature loves to encrypt itself."⁴⁷ The fact that nature "encrypts" itself, or hides

away, requires its movement to be a constant opening up, an unconcealment that Heidegger considers "the work-being of the work." Without going further into this relation, we may add that Heidegger's posture does not seem to be very far from what Klee denominates genesis.⁴⁸ The relation between art and nature occurs precisely because of the work's possibility to continue nature's most proper creation. Therefore, what is shown or what we can see is always a mystery that can only be contemplated secretly, thus, it hides in the process of its presentation (see *Green Terrain [grünes Gelände]*, 1938; plate 1).⁴⁹

Hence, the work of art is never a result, a product; it is never-ending. As Kandinsky would say about his own works, Klee wishes the spectator to wander about in his paintings. Just as the work is something yet to happen, something always becoming, the spectator learns to go back to it once again looking for the "surface," which is genesis as creation. To Klee, works are "a change of air and viewpoint."⁵⁰ As Heraclitus's rivers or Rilke's window, works of art are a "life-giving ocean":

We can still speak rationally of the salutary effects of art. We can say that imagination, born on the wings of instinctual stimuli, conjures up states of being that are somehow more encouraging and more inspiring than those we know on earth or in our conscious dreams.... Let yourself be carried to this life-giving ocean along broad rivers and delightful brooks—like the branches of concentrated graphic art.⁵¹

Through a Window (Durch ein Fenster) is the title of one of Klee's paintings made in 1932. This title invites us to interpret the painting's four sections as a window frame. The frame encloses

pensante I [El umbral de la creación]," in *Paul Klee: fragmentos de mundo*, ed. María del Rosario Acosta and Laura Quintana (Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, 2009), 177–78.

48 The relations between Klee and Heidegger would be the subject of a different essay. The notion of genesis stands very close to how Heidegger describes the way the work of art happens: as a battle between earth and world, as an unconcealment. The drawings that Klee uses to illustrate his essay, "Ways of Studying Nature" (Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 67) sufficiently demonstrate this relation. Additionally, Klee considers the work of art to be the presentation of the unfinished process of this original battle—occasionally he calls this tragedy. Some of these ideas will be brought out in the last section of the present essay. For a more detailed analysis on the possible relations between Heidegger and Klee (particularly on the sense of *techné* and its possibilities explored in Klee's works as they were perceived by Heidegger, see John Sallis, *La mirada de las cosas: el arte como provocación*, ed. and trans. María del Rosario Acosta [Bogotá: Universidad de los Andes, CESO, 2008], 69ff).

49 Heidegger recalls: "The Greeks early called this emerging and rising in itself and in all things *physis*...we call this ground the *earth*." "The earth appears openly clear as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is by nature undisclosed, that which shrinks from every disclosure and constantly keeps itself closed up." (Martin Heidegger, "The Origin of the Work of Art," in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter [New York: Harper and Row, 2001], 41, 46).

50 Klee, "Creative Credo," 80.

51 *Ibid.*

37 Klee, "On Modern Art," 13.

38 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 78.

39 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 270.

40 Monday, July 3, 1922 in Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 449.

41 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 169; see also Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 269.

42 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 430.

43 Klee, "On Modern Art," 9.

44 Monday, July 3, 1922 in Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 449.

45 *Ibid.*

46 *Ibid.*

47 Heraclitus's sentence belongs to fragment 123 in Hermann Diels, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker* (1903), 6th rev. ed. by Walther Kranz (Berlin: Weidemann, 1952). The reference to Dürero is found in Heidegger's work, *Holzwege*, in *Gesamtausgabe*, vol. 5 (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1950), 60. The relation between Heraclitus's sentence and Heidegger's thought is not explicit throughout his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art." I owe the evidence of this relation to a text by Mauricio González, "La imagen

a series of irregular colored squares placed one over another; they are covered by a technique Klee used in the early thirties: pointillism (*Pointillieren*), which—in the manner of Seurat—involves distributing colored dots throughout the painting’s fragments to expose the work’s multiple dimensions and possibilities within the colors’ different levels of appearance (and no longer in order to obtain a realistic image). The dialogue between the color spread out by the dots—originally white but covered subsequently by varnishes of color—and the color of the squares intends to show part of the “polyphony” and “multidimensionality” that Klee talks about in many of his essays on art.

In this case, the “through” is a trail left across the inversion of Alberti’s metaphor. More precisely, it is a trace of what has already been withdrawn. The work of art as a window, the window as a work of art, is still an opening, an expansion of a gaze, an instauration of the visible. Nonetheless, the opening, the expansion, and the instauration are now linked to what the work has to say within itself, in the intimacy of its exposure and secrecy. A ceaseless movement *makes the visible* as it wanders about the temporal space which opens up inside of it—in this sense, it brings down the bridges *through* which we once traveled from one side to another.

This is the nature of a work of art that has recognized itself as an image and has traveled its own trails of consciousness in the history of representation. Regarding this matter, Nancy writes—using a language that stands very close to the one suggested by the image of Klee’s window: “[the image] crosses the distance of the withdrawal even while maintaining it through its mark as an image. Or rather: through the mark that it is, it establishes simultaneously a withdrawal and a passage that, however, does not pass.”⁵²

Klee speaks to us—in conscious reference to tradition—about the dissolution of figurative form carried out in his work. A dissolution beginning inside the metaphor in a self-referential movement that characterizes what could be read in Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*—following John Sallis’s suggestion—as the “future” of art.⁵³ Art can overcome itself from within itself—declares Hegel—dissolving its traditional narrative-representative structure. It should stop being considered the means to an end beyond itself—even though this end may only be carried out by and in art—to become, rather, a discourse on its very nature. The way Hegel describes painting’s own process of dissolution suggests certain similarities to what happens in art since quests like Klee’s.⁵⁴

It is not at all the painter’s business, as may be supposed, to give us through his work of art an idea of the subject that he brings before us.... What should enchant us is not the subject of the painting and its lifelikeness, but the pure appearance which is wholly within the sort of interest that the subject has; [that is] appearance for its own sake, and art is mastery in the portrayal of all the secrets of this ever-profounder pure appearance of external realities.... This mastery in the production of the most striking effects through the magic of colour and the secrets of its spell has now an independent justification. The chief thing now is—independently of the topic itself—the visible element of colour and lighting. This is, as it were, an objective music, a pearl in colour.⁵⁵

In the process of its own dissolution, painting’s “chief interest” is revealed; here Hegel does not intend to announce a future, in a strict sense, but only to describe what he finds presently in Dutch painting; the *Künstlerliche Scheinmachen*,⁵⁶ the “artistic production of shining,”⁵⁷ that is, the making of appearance, of visibility itself.

Hence, the dissolution that conjures the metaphor within itself, which is barely suggested in Hegel’s work, is precisely what Klee is concerned about making explicit. To make appear, to create appearances, and to introduce in the visible something that otherwise would never, at any rate, be present: that is the artist’s task:

Something has been made visible which could not have been perceived without the effort to make it visible. Yes, you might see something, but you would have no exact knowledge of it. But here we are entering the realm of art; here we must be very clear about the aim of “making-visible.” Are we merely noting things seen in order to remember them or are we also trying to reveal what is not visible? Once we know and feel this distinction, we have come to the fundamental point of artistic creation.⁵⁸

To make visible does not mean the work will perpetuate what must be sacrificed in order to be represented. The work of art is no longer the memory of what is seen; it does not verify, in

52 Jean-Luc Nancy, “The Image—the Distinct,” in *The Ground of the Image*, trans. Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 3.

53 For a detailed discussion on this interpretation, see Sallis, *La mirada de las cosas* and Sallis, *Transfigurations: On the True Sense of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 158–59. The close relation between Hegel’s notions of painting—especially seventeenth-century Dutch painting, which is the example Hegel has in mind when he speaks about art as dissolution—and contemporary pictorial expressions was first suggested to me by Professor John Sallis in his courses on philosophy and art in Boston College during the winter semester of 2006.

54 I think that Klee, much more than any other contemporary artist—such as Kandinsky—best represents the idea of the dissolution of the metaphor of representation from within the work of art. Klee, unlike Kandinsky, is not concerned with moving definitely toward “abstraction” as a disappearance of all figurative form. What must be transformed is the gaze, the work of

art’s way of being, not its formal content. The work’s gaze and the work itself: the gaze that opens up to understanding the work as genesis. Thus, the object may appear, says Klee in “On Modern Art,” but only as another dimension—as a happy coincidence—yet not as an end to a pictorial quest. “The quarrel has less to do with the question of the object’s existence and more to do with any given appearance of this object, with the kind of object it is” (Klee, “On Modern Art,” 12).

55 G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1:598–600.

56 *Ibid.*, 2:812.

57 Sallis, *Transfigurations*, 96.

58 Monday, July 3, 1922 in Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 454.

its presence, what the representation lacks. This is no longer its paradox. "The visible is only an isolated case taken from the universe...there are more truths unseen than seen."⁵⁹ Thus, does "making visible" involve translating into the language of appearance what otherwise would remain hidden? Is this what it means to make the invisible visible? Is this supposed to be the artist's task now?

The artist "can bring things into being and make even their motion visible."⁶⁰ Therefore, it is not precisely a translation. To make visible is not to show in other ways and from a different perspective what is already there; rather, it means bringing things into being, through movement, as they enter the work's continuous process of creation. Movement is what becomes visible in works of art. Once again: genesis.

Consequently, things have a particular way of being in art; one might even say they have their own untranslatable language. If language cannot be reduced to be the communication of what can be communicated, since it is always also a symbol of what is incommunicable (to borrow an expression used by Walter Benjamin), perhaps Klee's *making visible* involves making visible language's most proper incommunicability which art has the power to "touch," to "see" interruptedly, and to show as it tries to translate it into appearance. On this behalf, it cannot be separated from the implications that concern this relation with any kind of language, with any presence of a symbolic nature. There is a constant loss of the visible in art's effort to make things visible by bringing them into presence. There is an implicit hiding away in all intent to introduce what is not visible in the field of appearance. Once again: exposure and secrecy, although no longer in the sense of what is being represented but in the sense of the work's process of presentation.

"The power of creativity cannot be named. It remains mysterious to the end. But what does not shake us to our foundations is no mystery."⁶¹ Thus, is the unnameable what becomes visible in the work of art? Is the work of art, in this sense, the action of keeping quiet? "Nature is loquacious to the point of confusion, let therefore the artist be silent."⁶² Hence, to make visible is, perhaps, initially also a way to guard the unnameable's mystery: the unfinished movement that speaks only about what it does not say, that only communicates its keeping quiet. The work of art is its own unfinished language.

This is just how Gadamer describes the event of modern art: the "speechlessness" of modern art "which addresses us so forcibly with its unique mute eloquence."⁶³ This search for silence, for its eloquence, might possibly be the *tragedy* Klee refers to as the *destiny* of every work of art. "Thus there is tragedy in the very beginning," Klee writes, "and correspondingly in the continuation of the process."⁶⁴ The tragedy that goes through the work's

creation is "man's fundamental tragedy": "man is half a prisoner, half borne on wings"⁶⁵ (see *Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying* [geht kaum mehr, fliegt noch nicht], 1927; plate 15). Like the human being, the work of art is also a prisoner of the impossibility of saying something that needs to remain in silence, of keeping quiet what is being said. Its eloquence is never completely silent; its silence never reaches the "claim of the absolute" that, to Klee, is present in everything that is artistic.⁶⁶ Rather, like the one winged hero Klee painted in 1905, whom he writes about in his *Diaries*:

"The hero with one wing," a tragicomic hero. Perhaps a Don Quixote of ancient times. This formula and poetic idea, which made its appearance in November 1904, has now finally been clarified and developed. The man, born with only one wing, in contrast with divine creatures, makes incessant efforts to fly. In doing so, he breaks his arms and legs, but persists under the banner of his idea.⁶⁷

This hero might be the artist or, perhaps, the work of art itself—a work of art that knows about the failure of its appearance, but that knows it just as the hero knows about his destiny: in order to summon it, once and again, in the tragedy of its own representation. ■

This paper would not have been possible without the assistance of Tania Ganitsky, who helped me with translating and editing its final version.

59 Klee, "Creative Credo," 78–79.

60 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 60.

61 *Ibid.*, 17.

62 Monday, July 3, 1922 in *ibid.*, 450.

63 Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Speechless Image," in *The Relevance of the Beautiful*, ed. R. Bernasconi, trans. N. Walker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 83–84.

64 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 407.

65 *Ibid.*

66 Monday, July 3, 1922 in *ibid.*, 461.

67 Klee, *Diaries*, #585.

Galen A. Johnson

Metamorphosis and Music: Klee and Merleau-Ponty

In this paper it is my goal to establish the history of the significance of Paul Klee for Merleau-Ponty's own thinking about art and for his philosophy of nature as it unfolds in *Eye and Mind*, *The Visible and the Invisible*, and the *Nature* lecture courses. In particular, we will be interested in how Klee's thought and art played a powerful role in Merleau-Ponty's re-conceptualization of nature in terms of genesis, metamorphosis, and the movement of life. Clarifying these ideas will lead us toward a better understanding of what Klee meant by abstraction and a "new romanticism" that he names a "cool romanticism," which we will argue is best conceptualized in relation to Klee's researches into the relationships between music and painting. We will be aided in these endeavors by looking at one constant motif in Klee's paintings of nature—the evolution of his paintings of trees and Goethe's romantic thesis that "all is leaf." Merleau-Ponty's late writings conceptualize Nature as a "leaf of Being."

THE HISTORY OF THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KLEE FOR MERLEAU-PONTY

The influence of Paul Klee on Merleau-Ponty's essay on philosophy and modern art, *Eye and Mind* (1961), is stamped in nearly every one of the five sections of the work. Klee is cited regarding reversibility between the artist and nature, regarding the "dimension of color," "the flexuous line," regarding depth, movement, metamorphosis, "the spark of fire" between sensing and sensible, absolute painting, and the question of giving titles to works. This all culminates in Merleau-Ponty's citation, at the end of part four, of Klee's words inscribed on his tombstone and incorporated as the last page of Klee's *Diaries*: "I cannot be grasped in immanence."¹ While Merleau-Ponty was working intently on *Eye and Mind* during 1959 through the summer of 1960, nearly simultaneously there was an explosion of interest in Klee in France. The first volume of Klee's pedagogical journals from his Bauhaus years (1921–31) that were edited and published in German in 1956 as *Das bildnerische Denken* appeared in French translation in 1959. The first German edition of Klee's 1898–1918 diaries also appeared in French in the same year, translated by Klossowski and cited by Merleau-Ponty. Finally, Will Grohmann's then definitive study of Klee, cited extensively in *Eye and Mind*, had been translated from German into French in 1954.²

Previous to *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty's earliest reference to Klee is found in *The Prose of the World* (1951), in its chapter "The Indirect Language." There, Merleau-Ponty contests Malraux's subjectivistic inter-

1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, 121–49, ed. and intro. Galen A. Johnson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1993), 148. French original: *L'œil et l'esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 87. The full epitaph in German reads as follows: "Diesseitig bin ich gar nicht fassbar, denn ich wohne grad so gut bei den Toten wie bei den Ugeborenen." The translation that Merleau-Ponty inserts into *Eye and Mind* is freer and more philosophical than the German original for Merleau-Ponty chooses the word "immanence" which implies its binary, "transcendence." The French translation by Klossowski is nearer the German original: "Ici-bas je ne suis guère saisissable, car j'habite tout aussi bien chez les morts que chez ceux qui ne sont pas nés encore" (Paul Klee, *Journal*, trans. Pierre Klossowski [Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1959], 354).

2 Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, trans. Jean Descoullayes and Jean Philippon (Paris: Flinker, 1954).

pretation of modern painting and writes that “it would be hard to apply these definitions to Cézanne or Klee.”³ After 1951, references to Klee reappear and multiply in Merleau-Ponty’s 1958–59 course, “La philosophie aujourd’hui.” There, Merleau-Ponty cites from Henri Michaux’s “Adventures of Lines” from his *Passages* on the lines of Klee. Michaux writes that Klee frees the line and is capable even of making a line dream, wait, hope, or think.⁴ Merleau-Ponty also discusses Klee’s titles, and very importantly, the leading epigram for *Eye and Mind* from Gasquet’s book on Cézanne: “What I am trying to convey to you is more mysterious; it is entwined in the very roots of being, in the impalpable source of sensations.”⁵ Following the citation, Merleau-Ponty makes the remarkable comment that the ontological “solution is to search in a study of Klee.”⁶ He goes on to speak of Klee’s trip to Tunisia in 1914 and his discovery of color as well of Klee’s discovery of abstraction as a way of approaching something concrete and a way of searching for “transcendence.” In the course of the following year, 1960–61, “L’ontologie cartésienne et l’ontologie d’aujourd’hui,” Merleau-Ponty returned to Klee’s colors and, again following Michaux, describes them as “exhaled at the right spot like patina or a mold.”⁷ He adds that Klee’s line is “serpentine” and that “the line does not imitate the visible, it renders visible.”⁸ Throughout the years 1958–61, the thought and art of Paul Klee had thoroughly invaded the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty.

METAMORPHOSIS AND FORM-GIVING LIFE: THE THEME OF TREES AND LEAVES

One way to read *Eye and Mind* is in terms of Merleau-Ponty’s aesthetics and philosophy of art, and we have done so in the past.⁹ Nevertheless, it is readily apparent that we can also read the work in terms of Merleau-Ponty’s emerging philosophy of nature, for the terms metamorphosis, genesis, movement, and life are found throughout the essay. His lecture courses at the Collège de France for three successive academic years from 1956 to 1960 just prior to the composition and publication of *Eye and Mind* had turned to “the concept of nature.” In *Eye and Mind*, Merleau-Ponty speaks of the metamorphosis of Being,¹⁰ the metamorphosis of seeing,¹¹ the metamorphosis of things

themselves,¹² and the metamorphosis of time.¹³ The metamorphosis of time refers explicitly to Rodin’s success with expressing movement in bronze in a work such as *The Walking Man (L’homme qui marche)*, 1907. “The person strides space,” and the work makes movement visible by its internal discordance. It portrays the body in an attitude that it never at any instant really held, legs and trunk each taken at a different instant, thus causing “transition and duration to arise in bronze.”¹⁴ Rodin’s *Walking Man* is a precedent for the powerful movement expressed by the forward posture Klee captured in his pen and ink drawing, *Striding Man (schreitender Mann)*, 1937.

“Metamorphosis” refers to the action or process of changing in appearance, form, shape, or substance. The word is from the Greek root *morphé*, meaning form, which combined with *meta*, means “to transform.” Morphology is the branch of biology that deals with the forms of living organisms and the relationships between their structures and successive phases. In the history of Western biology we find a broad range of meanings of “metamorphosis,” encompassing the remarkable variations of form exhibited by many insects and amphibians such as the butterfly and the frog, which undergo “serial metamorphosis,” as well as the transformations that exist between species or types in the history of evolutionary time.¹⁵ Klee studied and repeatedly drew nature’s metamorphoses in the plant kingdom from seed to stem, to leaf, to tree, to flower, to fruit, and again to seed. In fact, Klee placed his own notion of “form-giving life” at the heart of what he called “the elementary theory of creativity.” He deplored theories of form as fixed, static, permanent, immobile, as found in Platonism. He wrote:

Form must on no account ever be considered as something to be got over with, as a result, as an end, but rather as genesis, growth, essence.... What is good is form as movement, as action, as active form.... Form-giving is movement, action. Form-giving is life. These sentences constitute the gist of the elementary theory of creativity. We have now got to the heart of it. Its significance is absolutely basic; and I don’t think I can repeat the sentences often enough.¹⁶

In a related text, Klee states: “Let us, therefore, think not of form but of the act of forming.... Let us step by step translate this tendency from the small to the larger, advance towards the real:

3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. John O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), 55. French original: *La prose du monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969), 77.

4 Henri Michaux, *Passages* (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 175–78. Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours, 1959–1961*, ed. Stéphanie Ménasé (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 52.

5 “Ce que j’essaie de vous traduire est plus mystérieux, s’enchevêtre aux racines mêmes de l’être, à la source impalpable des sensations” (Merleau-Ponty, *Notes de cours*, 55).

6 Ibid., “Solution à chercher dans une étude de Klee.”

7 Ibid., “...exhalées au bon endroit comme patine ou moisissure.”

8 Ibid., “La ligne n’imite pas le visible, elle ‘rend visible.’”

9 Cf. Galen A. Johnson, “Chapter Two: Thinking Through *Eye and Mind*,” in *The Retrieval of the Beautiful: Thinking Through Merleau-Ponty’s Aesthetics* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010). Also cf. Galen A. Johnson, ed., *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*.

10 Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, 128; *L’œil et l’esprit*, 28.

11 Ibid., 130; 34.

12 Ibid., 132; 41.

13 Ibid., 145; 80.

14 Ibid., 145; 79.

15 Cf. Adolf Portmann, “Goethe and the Concept of Metamorphosis,” trans. Frederick Amrine, in *Goethe and the Sciences: A Reappraisal*, ed. Frederick Amrine, Francis J. Zucker, and Harvey Wheeler (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1987), 133–36.

16 Paul Klee, *Notebooks, Volume 2: The Nature of Nature*, 2nd ed., ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Heinz Norden (London: Lund Humphries, 1992), 269. German original: *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 2: Unendliche Naturgeschichte*, ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1970).

sation of the whole, retain creative leadership, never allow the creative reins to drop from our hands.¹⁷ This goes together with Klee's view that the work of art "is first of all genesis.... The pictorial work springs from movement, it is itself fixated movement, and it is grasped in movement."¹⁸

Influenced by Gestalt psychology, the notion of form in Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception is concerned with the relationships among foreground and background, figure and horizon, parts and whole, and particularly how these relationships are altered when things or light are placed in motion. Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology is wholly consistent with Klee regarding movement and form-giving life: form, he argues, is not static but most profoundly experienced in living movement as the perception of depth, or, in Husserl's language, as a "synthesis of transition." Following Robert Delaunay, Merleau-Ponty wrote in *Eye and Mind*, "depth is the new inspiration."¹⁹ He argued against the way depth is conceived of in geometric, Cartesian space, that is, as diminished to a third dimension and comprehended merely as breadth seen from the side. Rather Merleau-Ponty's is a depth of animation, dynamism, radiation, voluminosity, layers, rivals, light and shadows, "a flowing movement of planes of color which overlap, advance and retreat."²⁰

Merleau-Ponty introduced the concept of metamorphosis into the final year (1959–60) of his *Nature* lectures at the Collège de France in a discussion of Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man* and the kind of metamorphosis that evolves between species. The human being is a metamorphosis of animal being, Merleau-Ponty argued, though not in the terms of a philosophy of reflection or consciousness, which posits the human being as "rational animal," that is, as reason superimposed on body. The sentence from Teilhard that so enchanted Merleau-Ponty was this: "Man came silently into the world" (*L'homme est entré sans bruit*).²¹ That the human being entered silently means "no rupture."²² The morphological variations in the preliminary types ("attempts") of hominization before the Age of the Reindeer, that is, before Lascaux, are all transitional forms in which only a few things are new, for example, erect bipedal posture leaves the forearms free, the eyes get closer together and fix on what the hand takes up, "the very gesture, exteriorized, of reflection."²³ "There is a metamorphosis," Merleau-Ponty writes, "not a beginning from zero."²⁴ In the pre-history of mankind, there were pre-hominids and without our being able to fix an exact point of appearance, in the Age of the Reindeer there appears the human

"with paintings, tombs, culture."²⁵ Merleau-Ponty asks, in what does metamorphosis consist? He answers that it means there is no "descent" of reflection into a body of which the body would be only the instrument. There is a simultaneity between the body and reflection in which the human body achieves a depth over time, which is an intersubjectivity and intercorporeity that is communication and culture. Merleau-Ponty concludes: "Thereby this is not a hierarchical but a lateral relation, or *Ineinander*,"²⁶ an "intertwining" in the morphological metamorphosis between the animal, pre-hominid, and human.

To demonstrate how profoundly this re-conceptualization of nature in terms of metamorphosis marks a decisive shift in Merleau-Ponty's late philosophy of nature, we need only refer to those passages in his very first book, *The Structure of Behavior* (1939), in which Merleau-Ponty advocates precisely for a rupture between human and animal forms. There he argued that "the word 'life' does not have the same meaning in animality and humanity...the act of dressing becomes the act of adornment or also of modesty and thus reveals a new attitude toward oneself and others. Only men see that they are nude."²⁷ Merleau-Ponty continues this analysis by rehearsing a series of demarcations of human from animal pertaining to work, speech, art, suicide, and revolution, all of which are marked by the fundamental characteristic of "ambiguity," which means a simultaneous positing and surpassing or transcendence. Then he concluded that "man can never be an animal: his life is always more or less integrated than that of an animal."²⁸ Between 1939 and 1960, the evolution of Merleau-Ponty's own philosophy regarding life, nature, and human nature could not be more pronounced, and the thinking and art of Paul Klee pertaining to genesis, movement, and life was one of the great influences in this metamorphosis.

In the gallery of eight art works that Merleau-Ponty selected to publish in *Eye and Mind*, from Paul Klee he selected *Park near Lu[cerne]* (*Park bei Lu[zern]*), 1938 (fig. 1). Merleau-Ponty himself does not explain directly why he chose this work from Klee's oeuvre, but it was clearly an exemplary work for him that served as a monogram of the fundamentals of his new philosophy of art and philosophy of nature, particularly pertaining to the reversibility between painter and painted, between human and nature. There are multiple ways of seeing this painting. It is a pictographic work and if we see it in light of its title, it can appear as the map of a park or it can be seen more figurally as a park with its bending trees. Two dots placed directly in the center and separated by a curved line form what might be the eyes and nose of a face looking back at us. The painting brings to mind the citation from *Eye and Mind* in which Merleau-Ponty quotes André Marchand from his interview with Georges Charbonnier, which Merleau-Ponty takes to express Klee's sentiment, "as André Marchand says, after Klee [après Klee]:" "Some days I felt that the trees

17 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 67.

18 Paul Klee, "Creative Credo," in *Notebooks, Volume 1: The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: George Wittenborn, 1961), 78. German original first published in *Tribüne der Kunst und Zeit: Eine Schriftensammlung*, ed. Kasimir Edschmid (Berlin: Eric Reiss, 1920).

19 Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, 140; *L'œil et l'esprit*, 64.

20 *Ibid.*, 141; 68.

21 Cf. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper and Row, 1959), 183, 185.

22 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, comp. Dominique Ségolard, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), 267, 272. French original: *La Nature: Notes, cours du Collège de France* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995), 334, 339.

23 *Ibid.*, 267; 334.

24 *Ibid.*, 272; 340.

25 *Ibid.*, 272; 339.

26 *Ibid.*, 273; 340.

27 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden L. Fisher (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 174. French original: *La structure du comportement* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1942), 188.

28 *Ibid.*, 181; 196.



Fig. 1: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Park near Lu[cerne]* [*Park bei Lu[cerne]*], 1938/129. Oil and colored paste on paper and jute fabric, 100 x 70 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

were looking at me, were speaking to me...I was there, listening.... I think that the painter must be penetrated by the universe and not want to penetrate it."²⁹ In this way, *Park near Lu[cerne]* is a beautiful embodiment of Merleau-Ponty's concept of aesthetic reversibility. Left and right, inside and outside, self and other, self and world reverse positions; agent becomes recipient, and activity becomes passivity.

Parks and gardens were a constant theme of Klee's nature studies, nature collections, and nature pictures. A beautiful exhibition of these was mounted at the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern in 2008 titled *In Paul Klee's Enchanted Garden*, together with an equally beautiful catalogue.³⁰ In the thematic index of Klee's titles compiled by the Klee Foundation, the most frequent natural subjects are "flower, flora, blossom, and blooming" (194 instances),



Fig. 2: Paul Klee, *Fig Tree (Feigenbaum)*, 1929/240. Watercolor and pencil on paper on cardboard, 28 x 20.8 cm, private collection.

followed by "garden" (185) and "tree" (103).³¹ Nevertheless, Grohmann points out that Klee's titles were added *post facto* as secondary to the primary work of the painting: "Very often picture and title so complement each other that the latter adds a further nuance to the work, stressing particular elements in it.... Though the titles are only secondary, they betoken a highly suggestive intermingling of painting and poetry."³² So from the point of view of the philosophy of nature we have been discussing, *Park near Lu[cerne]* appears more abstractly as a suggestion of beginnings, the description of a pattern of growth: a start, a branching, further branching, a new start, here and there sterility without branching, but then through the form in the center, the suggestion of a tree, the concentration of growth in the possible development of fruit with potentialities for further growth.³³

When we turn to Klee's *Notebooks*, we make a great discovery. An image of *Park near Lu[cerne]* is placed in volume two near the end of a section of paintings and drawings titled "Evolution of a theme: Trees as rendered by Klee from his youth to maturity."³⁴ Here we find a collection of twenty-four paintings

29 Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, 129; *L'œil et l'esprit*, 31. "Il faut d'abord une grande accoutumance du monde visible pour arriver à le désintégrer, à voir son âme, à voir ce que se cache à l'intérieur. Par exemple, dans une forêt, j'ai senti, certains jours, que c'étaient les arbres qui me regardaient, qui me parlaient. Moi, j'étais là...écoutant. Ce n'était pas moi qui regardais l'arbre. C'est l'arbre qui me regardait" (Georges Charbonnier, *Le Monologue du peintre* [Paris: R. Julliard, 1959], 143).

30 Michael Baumgartner and Marianne Keller, eds., *In Paul Klee's Enchanted Garden*, exh. cat. (Osftildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008).

31 Cf. Richard Verdi, *Klee and Nature* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1984), 243n78.

32 Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, 379.

33 Cf. David Burnett, "Paul Klee: The Romantic Landscape," *Art Journal* 36, no. 4 (Summer 1977): 326.

34 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 63–79.

or drawings of trees stretching across Klee's career spanning the years from 1896 to 1940. They include the well-known watercolor, *Fig Tree (Feigenbaum)* (1929; fig. 2); the geometric and divisionist, yet moving oil painting, *Lone Fir Tree (einsame Tanne)*, 1932; and the watercolor, *Young Tree (Chloranthemum) (junger Baum [Chloranthemum])*, 1932, which anticipates and is quite similar to the pen and paper drawing in this exhibition, *Little Tree (Bäumchen)* (1935; plate 9). In this evolution of tree drawings, it is striking that Klee's early tree portraits from 1896 to 1912 are quite representational and realist, achieving depth through the techniques of traditional perspective drawing and painting. There were many more from this period that are similar: *Untitled (Landscape with Pond) (Ohne Titel [Landschaft mit Teich])*, 1895/71; *Untitled (Single Tree on a Hill) (Ohne Titel [Einzigem Baum auf einem Hügel])*, 1895/73; and *Untitled (Grassy Slope Seen through Trees) (Ohne Titel [Wiesengang durch Bäume gesehen])*, c. 1898/117. Then we encounter a chronological gap from 1912 to 1929 in the evolution of tree works presented in the Notebooks, after which we are greeted with a multiplicity of abstract tree portraits stretching from 1929 to 1940 and composed of lines, more or less geometric, more or less narrow or broad, some straight, some curving. *Park near Lufcerne* comes near the end of these and is composed of a mid-range of heavy lines and colored forms.³⁵ In Klee's maturity, we might ask, why did he find abstraction more conducive and even "truer" to his emerging concept of nature?

In the intervening gap in the tree works from 1912 to 1929, we find three of Klee's major theoretical statements on art as well as the majority of his years at the Bauhaus school from 1921 to 1931, in Weimar from 1921 to 1925, then in Dessau. From these years of Klee's pedagogical research come the two volumes of the Notebooks. In volume one, *The Thinking Eye*, we find Klee's "Ways of Studying Nature" (1919–23), "Creative Credo" (1918), and the Jena lecture (January 26, 1924) titled "On Modern Art." These texts reveal a decisive shift in Klee's thinking and art.

"Ways of Studying Nature" begins with the famous statement that "for the artist, dialogue with nature remains a *conditio sine qua non*. The artist is a man, himself nature and a part of nature in natural space."³⁶ The essay quickly marks several distinctions between ways to study nature. It was "yesterday's artistic creed" to engage in what Klee calls the "painfully precise investigation of appearance." Following this way, excellent pictures were obtained of the object's surface filtered by the air. Klee refers to this as the "art of optical sight," and we must presume that Klee's early studies of nature and his early paintings of trees fall under this category and this shortcoming. "The artist of today," he writes, "is more than an improved camera; he is more complex, richer, and wider."³⁷ In "On Modern Art" Klee names the impressionists as our "antipodes of yesterday" and says they were perfectly right

to live with the vines and undergrowth of everyday appearances, but "our own pounding heart drives us downward, down deep to the primal ground."³⁸ "Ways of Studying Nature" continues to say that today's artist recognizes his place in the cosmos and seeks a "sense of totality" that goes beyond the outer appearance in a visible penetration to the "inner being" of things. Klee mentions three ways in which this is done. First, there is a dissection of the inside through planar sections as "anatomy becomes physiology." Human, animal, and plant anatomies are sciences of the observable structures of organisms, observable with the unaided eye or with the microscope, and surface anatomy studies the structures that can readily be seen on the contours or surfaces of the body. Physiology studies the organs, cells, molecules, and their biochemistry that enables a bodily organism to live and function. If the impressionists were good anatomists, Klee seeks from the modern artist a more physiological study of nature. In addition to study of the "inside," there is also the "non-optical way of intimate physical contact" that Klee says reaches the eye of the artist "from below," earthbound. Klee increasingly felt as his art unfolded and matured that the aesthetic act emerges from a depth that is an affective desire, for which he did not hesitate to use the word "unconscious." Finally, there is the "non-optical contact through the cosmic bond that descends from above." In this third way, the artist rises toward a "metaphysical view of the world" and is able to "form free abstract structures which surpass schematic intention and achieve a new naturalness, the naturalness of the work."³⁹ Klee illustrates the inner way of nature study through planar dissection by a cross-sectional line drawing titled *Landscape-physiognomic (landschaftlich-physiognomisch)*, 1931, in which the combination of all three ways are shown with a schematic diagram showing the eye of the artist in circular contact with all three realms, with the appearances of things (optical-physical way), with the depth of earth below (non-optical way), and with the world above (metaphysical way).

Intervening right in the middle of "Ways of Studying Nature" in the Notebooks is a line study of leaf and tree, utterly striking for its simplicity in displaying the complementary effects of inner leaf ribs or veins and outer leaf forms. Moving from left to right on three different rows of leaf drawings, Klee demonstrates how the same inner linear vein structure can appear to the eye quite differently in different outward leaf shapes. The outer variations in leaf shape catch the eye and one must take a "second look" to realize that each outer leaf shape retains the same inner veining pattern. For Klee, a tense relationship like an "argument" exists between energy, which is expressed by the inner linear patterning, and shape or mass, which is the extended outer form. Klee writes: "Our concept of the veins as constructive, articulating forces entails thinking of the evolution of a leaf (in the pictorial sense) as an argument between linear force or peculiarity and the two-dimensional massiveness or multiplicity."⁴⁰ The leaf drawings also demonstrate that the same inner line structure can

35 Ibid., 73.

36 Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," in *The Thinking Eye*, 63. German original: *Wege des Naturstudiums*, first printed in *Staatliches Bauhaus Weimar, 1919–1923*.

37 Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," 63.

38 Paul Klee, "On Modern Art," (in this volume) 14. German original: *Über die moderne Kunst* (Bern: Benteli, 1945).

39 Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," 66–67.

40 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 5.



Fig. 3: Paul Klee, *Illuminated Leaf (belichtetes Blatt)*, 1929/274. Watercolor and pen on paper on cardboard, 30.9 x 23 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

equally be both leaf as it can be the whole tree. The first line drawing on each row, which is the inner leaf pattern, can be recognized equally as a line drawing of the trunk and branching of a tree. Klee's fantastic *Illuminated Leaf (belichtetes Blatt)* of 1929 (fig. 3) shows the same repetition between inner leaf veining and tree branching. In these repetitions, inner and outer, parts and wholes, are each rendered visible and form an inextricable relationship. Each refers to the other. Grohmann wrote: "In the smallest leaf, analogies to the whole law are exactly reproduced."⁴¹ Klee himself wrote in 1923: "A leaf is part of the whole. If the tree is an organism, the leaf is an organ. The small parts of the whole are again articulated in themselves.... The articulation of the whole is defined by roots, trunk and crown. The articulation of a leaf is defined by stem, veins, and leaf tissue."⁴² The tree is, thus, a metamorphosis of leaf.

Klee created his own taxonomy or typology of outer leaf forms as different energetic shapes. He argued for three principal types and writes: "Thus we may distinguish an archetype (oval), a transitional form and a composite form."⁴³ These are elaborated by Baumgartner: "an oval 'Urform,' or 'original form,' which

results when the flow of sap is equally distributed, a 'transitional form,' and a 'hybrid form,' such as a maple leaf, whose contours are 'produced' and fundamentally determined by the strength of their energy, causing individual inner forms to emerge."⁴⁴ Klee's argument for the oval leaf as archetype or *Urform* indicates Klee's affinity with romanticism and the morphology of Goethe's model of a metaphysical *Urpflanze*, which is the unitary source for the variation of plant forms as a totality. Goethe's scientific writings included his study *The Metamorphosis of Plants* (1790) as well as his *Theory of Colors* (1810) disputing Newton's color optics. Goethe limited his botanical study to flowering plants and, in particular, annual grasses, and his central insight is that all the organs along the length of a shoot can be traced back to a single, underlying form—"everything is leaf." As Adolf Portmann summarizes: "Goethe marshals an abundance of evidence showing the transformations of the foliage leaf, transitional forms between foliage leaf and corolla, between corolla and stamens—all evidence pointing to the metamorphosis of a single, unified, fundamental form."⁴⁵ Baumgartner cites two sources that indicate Klee's awareness and interest in Goethe's morphology, the first, his attendance at a lecture by Rudolf Steiner in 1918 which was a detailed exposition of Goethe's theory of metamorphosis, and the second, a letter from Klee to Katherine S. Dreier, October 21, 1922, in which Klee speaks of their common interest in Goethe's "archetypal plant."⁴⁶

Merleau-Ponty was also evidently aware of the Goethe morphological thesis, for in the *Nature* course in which he discusses metamorphosis, he cites a text on the unity of flower and leaf from Teilhard de Chardin, which agrees with Goethe's main insight but makes an important qualification. Merleau-Ponty cites this text from Chardin: "In a flower, the parts of the calyxes, the sepals, the petals, the stamens, and pistil are not leaves. They have probably never been leaves. But they carry in their attachments and in their texture all that would have given a leaf if they were not formed under an influence and with a new destiny."⁴⁷ Though Merleau-Ponty objects to Goethe's morphology as "idealist" for its conception of "transcendent finality,"⁴⁸ the thesis that all of plant nature is leaf settled down into Merleau-Ponty's thinking

44 Michael Baumgartner, "'Reducing the contingent to its essence': Paul Klee's Dialogue with Nature," in *In Paul Klee's Enchanted Garden*, 30.

45 Portmann, "Goethe and the Concept of Metamorphosis," 135.

46 Baumgartner, "'Reducing the contingent to its essence,'" 27.

47 Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 267–68; *La Nature*, 339–40. Cf. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, 179.

48 Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 244; *La Nature*, 309. Discussion of Goethe by Merleau-Ponty is extremely rare and what we have is cryptic. One linkage between Merleau-Ponty and Goethe would have been Merleau-Ponty's intense study of Schelling, which appears extensively in the first *Nature* lecture course (1956–57), "Chapter Four: The Romantic Conception of Nature." Near the end of "The Philosopher and his Shadow," Merleau-Ponty argues phenomenology must incorporate natural being, the "barbarous" source Schelling spoke of (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964], 178. French original: *Signes* [Paris: Gallimard, 1960], 225). Schelling's philosophy of nature crucially influenced Goethe and the two were close friends who entered into direct dialogue on the concept of nature and metamorphosis. Cf. Robert J. Richards, "Chapter Eight: Schelling's Dynamic Evolutionism," in *The Romantic Conception of Life: Science and Philosophy in the Age of Goethe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

41 Grohmann, Paul Klee, 192.

42 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 13.

43 *Ibid.*, 17.

sufficiently that he began the third *Nature* lecture course with this statement of his philosophical project: "To study Nature as a leaf of Being = as part of this complex which reveals all of it.... Nature as a 'leaf' of Being, and the problems of philosophy are concentric."⁴⁹ The metaphor of the leaf carried forward right into *The Visible and the Invisible* where Merleau-Ponty adopted it to describe both the human body as an exemplar of the flesh of the world itself, that fundamental ontological element and relation. He wrote, for example: "The openness through flesh: the two leaves of my body and the leaves of the visible world...it is between these intercalated leaves that there is visibility."⁵⁰ Or again, he wrote: "When we speak of the flesh of the visible...we mean that carnal being, as a being of depths, of several leaves or several faces, a being in latency, and a presentation of a certain absence, is a prototype of Being."⁵¹ In a Working Note of March 1960, we again find the concept of the world as a "leaf of Being."⁵² And in a remarkable Working Note from November 1960, he wrote of the human body's reflexivity, in other words its sensible capacity to be both touching and touched, in terms of an interiority and exteriority that is an "internal leaf with an external leaf, their folding back on one another."⁵³ The body opens onto a "cosmology of the visible, in the sense that, considering end-time and endospace, for me it is no longer a question of origins, nor limits, nor of a series of events going to a first cause, but one sole explosion of Being which is forever."⁵⁴ It would be distracting here to enter into a full account of Merleau-Ponty's ontology of the flesh of the world, but it is important to see how thoroughly the thesis that "all is leaf" plays a critical role in his mature ontological vocabulary and thinking.

American romantic philosopher Henry David Thoreau not only knew and studied Goethe's morphology of plants, he also did not hesitate to extend the thesis that "all is leaf" to the entire natural order, including human beings. In the "Spring" chapter from *Walden*, Thoreau imagines himself standing in the laboratory of the "Artist who made the world and me" and discovers the "overhanging leaf" as the "prototype" of the natural world. "You thus find in the very sands an anticipation of the vegetable leaf.... The feathers and wings of birds are still drier and thinner leaves.... Even ice begins with delicate crystal leaves.... The whole tree itself is but one leaf, and rivers are still vaster leaves." From these leaf forms of nature, Thoreau turned to the human body: "Is not the hand a spreading palm leaf with its lobes and veins. The ear may be regarded, fancifully, as a lichen, *umbilicaria*, on the side of the head, with its lobe or drop." He concludes powerfully, that "the Maker of this earth but patented a leaf.... The earth is living poetry like the leaves of a tree, which precede flower and fruit—not a fossil earth, but a living earth."⁵⁵

It is necessary to stress that the archetypal leaf form together with all three leaf patterns drawn by Klee are not observational drawings that Klee made of particular leaves from nature, rather they are imaginary leaf "essences" formed on the basis of rules or laws regarding leaf formation. Likewise, *Little Tree* (plate 9) in the present exhibition, is not an observational drawing of any particular tree like an oak or maple, rather it is a tree-like construction depicting interlocking lines of energy in a tree's leaf structure. For Tuesday, October 30, 1923, Klee assigned the following exercise for his Bauhaus students: "Imaginary leaves on the basis of the foregoing insight into basic rules. A free geometric-aesthetic effort."⁵⁶ Just previously, he had entered into an extensive study of "angle progression and angle regression" in palm fan leaves that he titled "the truth about palm-leaf fans."⁵⁷ Richard Verdi reports an instance in which Klee requested his Bauhaus pupils to draw the form of a leaf: "Pacing slowly up and down, Klee said a few words, softly and with long pauses; thereupon all of us felt that we had never before seen a leaf, or rather the leaf, the essence of the leaf.... We had to admit that the first thing we had to do was to learn to see before we could draw another line."⁵⁸ In his color theory, Klee also sought for rules, rigor, and totality, developing a "canon of color totality" created by circles, triangles, and proportions to express logically the color relationships of the color wheel as true and false pairs, complements, oppositions, balance, and equilibrium.⁵⁹

Klee's stress upon the imaginary and formal essence as revealed by geometrical angles, the laws of color, and planimetric construction by the artist is entirely consistent with one particular stress in the "Credo," namely upon formal elements and the artist's effort to construct a "formal cosmos" that is like the Creation itself. This is Klee's declaration against representation of appearances in favor of "rendering visible," formalism, and the specific meaning he sought to give to abstraction: "Abstract formal elements are put together like numbers and letters to make concrete beings or abstract things; in the end a formal cosmos is achieved, so much like the Creation that a mere breath suffices to transform religion into act."⁶⁰ The formal rigor Klee is requiring of his modern artist leads on to what Klee means by abstraction. "To be an abstract painter," Klee writes, "does not mean to abstract from naturally occurring opportunities for comparison."⁶¹ Thus, abstraction, for Klee, is not like a process of empirical observation and logic of induction, as he says, observational comparisons of a woman, a cat, a flower, an egg, or a cube. Neither is abstraction what it was for an artist such as Willem de Kooning, an art of fragmentation, overlapping pieces, jumbled calligraphic forms, a head-like shape here, a bone-like shape there. De Kooning's was an aesthetic of "glimpses," of splashing colors and streak-

49 Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 205, 204; *La Nature*, 266, 265.

50 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 131. French original: *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 173.

51 *Ibid.*, 136; 179.

52 *Ibid.*, 242; 295.

53 *Ibid.*, 265; 318.

54 *Ibid.*

55 The citations of Henry David Thoreau are from "Spring," in *Walden* [1854;

Boston: Beacon Press, 1997], 286–89.

56 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 22, 23.

57 *Ibid.*, 19–20.

58 Verdi, *Klee and Nature*, 24–25. Also cf. Richard Verdi, "Botanical Imagery in the Art of Klee," in *Paul Klee: Dialogue with Nature*, ed. Ernst-Gerhard Giese (Munich: Prestel, 1991), 28–29.

59 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 467–511.

60 Klee, "Creative Credo," 78, 79.

61 Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," 72.

ing shapes comparable to ancient Greek poetic fragments or the poetic fragments of language found in one like Ezra Pound.⁶² Rather, for Klee, to abstract means "to distil pure pictorial relations: light to dark, color to light and dark, color to color, long to short, broad to narrow, sharp to dull, left-right, above-below, being-in front, circle to square to triangle. In regard to the question, 'Abstract?' the treatment of direction is crucial. If you set the yellow forward and the blue back, then that is abstract."⁶³ Klee adds that the pictorial outcome of a cat or dog is not to be condemned if it emerges from pure pictorial elements. In a moment of humor or even sarcasm, Klee describes an abstract artist who is bending every effort to group the formal elements—line, form, color—purely and logically when a layman, looking over his shoulder, utters the devastating words: "But that doesn't look like Uncle Fred at all! The artist, if his nerves are well-steered, thinks, 'To hell with Uncle Fred, I've got to keep working on this, I need to add some building blocks...'"⁶⁴

In "Creative Credo," Klee offers several examples of what the modern abstract seeks to render visible. One is the experience of a modern man as he walks across the deck of a steamer compared with how a man of antiquity would be represented sailing a boat, another is a man sleeping as an interplay of functions, united in rest. The third is a word picture of how the abstract artist presents a tree: "An apple tree in blossom, the roots, the rising sap, the trunk, a cross section with annual rings, the blossom, its structure, its sexual functions, the fruit, the core and seeds. An interplay of states of growth."⁶⁵

The religious analogy between the artist and the Creator that Klee asserts based upon the construction of a formal cosmos should be somewhat qualified, for Klee develops a parable of the tree in the lecture "On Modern Art" in which the artist is distinguished from nature. There is a sense in which the artist himself is a tree, according to Klee, more specifically, the artist is the trunk of the tree: "from that structure juices flow upward to the artist, passing through him, through his eye."⁶⁶ The artwork is the crown of the tree, visible on all sides, unfolding in space and time. In this way, art expresses nature for the artist has a "modest position" in relation to the natural forces that flow through him into the artwork. "And yet, in the place that has been assigned to him, at the trunk, he is doing no more than gathering and conducting whatever it is that comes to him from the depths.... And the beauty of the crown is not he himself, but what has merely passed through him."⁶⁷ This aspect of Klee's parable of the tree is captured quite beautifully by Paul Valéry in a short fragment of a poem titled "In Praise of Water": "Consider a plant, regard a mighty tree, and you will discern that it is none other than an upright river pouring

into the air of the sky. By the tree WATER climbs to meet light. Of a few salts in the earth WATER constructs a body that is in love with the day, to the whole universe stretching and outstretching liquid powerful arms that end in gentle hands."⁶⁸

Yet Klee's parable takes another turn in distinguishing the human artist from the tree of Nature or tree of life, different from being a purely naturalistic creator like the Artist Creator of the universe. The crown of the tree is not a mere mirror of what is going on in the roots for the work of the artist intervenes. Klee writes: "It would not occur to anyone to demand of the tree that it shape its crown exactly like its root structure. Everyone will understand that the below and the above cannot mirror one another perfectly. It is clear that over time the different functions in the various elemental realms will diverge from one another in quite vital ways."⁶⁹ Some people, Klee asserts, would like to deny the artist the deviations his art demands and even accuse the artist of incompetence or deliberate distortion. For Klee, the artist's position with respect to nature is analytical and quite like scientific work, which, as Baumgartner puts it, "reveals insights into the genesis and structure of objects that are not accessible to the superficial gaze."⁷⁰ Richard Verdi concurs: "The role which Klee envisions for the artist is in many respects that of a disinterested purveyor of truth—of a philosopher or a scientist."⁷¹ The artist considers the dimensions of an object in a new light, and if what he arrives at seems to be a "distortion" of natural forms, Klee states: "He does not feel so bound by these realities, because he does not see in these culminating forms the essence of the creative process of nature. More important to him than the culminating forms are the formative forces."⁷² Nature is unfinished, it is in genesis and metamorphosis, on the way. "Nothing should be done headlong," Klee says, "it has to grow, has to mature, and if some day the time is ripe for such a work, so much the better!"⁷³

Thus, Klee's philosophy of picture-making displays a romanticism that searches for the unity and totality in all things going back to Goethe's morphology and thesis, "all is leaf," combined with a formalism embodied in Klee's rigorous and systematic study of line, form, and color as an abstract language of pure pictorial relations. Yet to leave his worldview here would be to miss the "heart" of what Klee is doing, all of its affect, latent desire, and feeling. It would attribute to Klee a "cold romanticism" that is detached, rationalistic, and formal—the creation of images in which emotion is not allowed utterance. This would contradict the substance of so many moving works, particularly many near the end of his career, including the angel drawings, *Kettledrummer* (*Paukenspieler*), 1940, and the *Untitled (Last Still Life)* (*Ohne Titel [letzten Stilleben]*), 1940, to name but a few. Rather, in a diary entry from 1914 while Klee was in Tunisia, he spoke of a "new romanticism": "Ingres is said to have ordered the motionless; I

62 Cf. Thomas B. Hess, *Abstract Painting: Background and American Phase* (New York: Viking Press, 1951). Cited in Jed Perl, *New Art City* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005), 116. Cf. Willem de Kooning, "Content is a Glimpse," in *The Collected Writings of Willem de Kooning* (Madras: Hanuman Books, 1988), 67–98, esp. 82–83.

63 Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," 72.

64 Klee, "On Modern Art," 12.

65 Klee, "Creative Credo," 79.

66 Klee, "On Modern Art," 10.

67 Ibid.

68 Paul Valéry, *The Collected Works of Paul Valéry: Poems in the Rough*, trans. Hilary Corke, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 10.

69 Klee, "On Modern Art," 10.

70 Baumgartner, "Reducing the contingent to its essence," 29.

71 Verdi, *Klee and Nature*, 28.

72 Klee, "On Modern Art," 13.

73 Ibid., 14.

want to go beyond pathos and order motion.⁷⁴ A few entries later he ascribed to his style of abstraction a “cool romanticism”: “One deserts the realm of the here and now to transfer one’s activity into a realm of the yonder where total affirmation is possible. Abstraction. The cool romanticism of this style without pathos is unheard of.”⁷⁵ In both of these entries, it is striking that Klee dissociates his art from “pathos,” but this is not a dissociation from emotion and yearning; *pathé* are the passions and, as such, are forms of suffering. Mozart, Klee says, took refuge in the joyous side of the world, for the most part. Klee identifies with Mozart, yet says that because his own heart that beats for the world seems mortally wounded, his art produces forms that are “impure crystals”: “In the great pit of forms lie broken fragments to some of which we still cling. They provide abstraction with its material. A junkyard of unauthentic elements for the creation of impure crystals.”⁷⁶

In a telling and lengthy entry from 1918 near the end of Klee’s *Diaries*, Klee compares himself with fellow artist and close friend, Franz Marc, who “is more human, he loves more warmly, is more demonstrative. He responds to animals as if they were human.”⁷⁷ For himself, he does not love animals and all creatures with “an earthly warmth”: “I tend to dissolve into the whole of creation...the earth-idea gives way to the world-idea. My love is distant and religious.”⁷⁸ Klee sums up with a mysterious sentence that mirrors a theme from his tomb’s epitaph: “My fire is more like that of the dead or of the unborn.”⁷⁹ This could mean many things, but in its context, I take it this means that the love Klee feels for nature and puts into his art is more universal and cosmic, not the love by one individual for another particular individual, but the love that is like the attraction of magnetic poles, the energy and desire to be born, equally the sacrifice and submission of dying. In terms of Plato’s *Symposium*, Klee is not Alcibiades with his inebriated and suffering passion for the singular Socrates that is driving him mad, Klee is more like Eryximachus, the medical doctor who praised Love for its occurrence everywhere in the universe, in plants, in animals, in humans, and in the movements of the heavenly bodies. To Eryximachus, both medicine and music are sciences of the “effects of Love on rhythm and harmony.... This is the honorable, heavenly species of Love, produced by the melodies of Urania, the Heavenly Muse.”⁸⁰

Indeed, the warmer elements in Klee’s picture theory caught the attention and admiration of Merleau-Ponty. From Klee’s “Creative Credo,” Merleau-Ponty emphasized the elements of spark and fire. Klee wrote: “A certain fire flares up; it is conducted through the hand, flows to the picture and there bursts into a

spark, closing the circle whence it came: back into the eye and farther.”⁸¹ Citing this very text, Merleau-Ponty wrote about the artist in *Eye and Mind*: “In the immemorial depth of the visible, something has moved, caught fire, which engulfs his body; everything he paints is an answer to this incitement, and his hand is ‘nothing but the instrument of a distant will.’”⁸² In *La philosophie aujourd’hui*, Merleau-Ponty cites at length Klee’s 1924 Jena lecture in which Klee says that the artist “is perhaps, without really wanting to be, a philosopher.”⁸³ Merleau-Ponty quotes the following text: “Who as an artist would not want [désirer/ai] to dwell there? In the womb of nature, in the primal ground of Creation, which holds the secret key to everything that is?”⁸⁴

How can one reconcile the formal and rigorous side of Klee’s romanticism and picture making with his apparently easy stress upon the artist’s experience and expression of primordial depth, desire, yearning, and passivity? To pose this question is part of the riddle of Klee and to seek its solution we could well return to leaves, trees, and nature. For leaves are not only rules, they are rhythms. Nature is not only algorithms, Nature is harmonies and melodies. Klee’s reference to Mozart is significant. To understand his new, cool romanticism, we should follow the musical elements in Klee’s picture theory and picture making. The topic is necessary though it is vast and we can make only a start here.

METAMORPHOSIS AND MUSICAL PAINTING: COOL ROMANTICISM

Metamorphosis is not only a biological term and reality, it is also a poetic term and a musical term. Ovid wrote *The Metamorphoses* recounting the transformations in the play of emotional extremes and illogical, conflicting impulses, in the relations among mortals and gods in the ancient Greek myths. Kafka wrote another *Metamorphosis* (*Die Verwandlung*) recounting the tragic transformations that occurred in the life of Gregor Samsa together with his family, his father, mother, and dear sister, Grete who betrayed him, when “he woke one morning from troubled dreams and found himself transformed in his bed into a monstrous insect [Ungeziefer].”⁸⁵ Phillip Glass composed the incidental music for two separate theater productions of Kafka’s story that were subsequently incorporated into a five-part piece for solo piano titled *Metamorphosis*. Klee maintained a lifelong love for music. “Music, for me,” he wrote, “is a love bewitched.... I have always been on good terms only with music.”⁸⁶ Klee grew up with parents who both were musicians and his father was a professor of music who specialized in teaching voice, Klee himself was a violinist, and he married Lily Stumpf, a pianist.⁸⁷

74 Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), #941. German original: Paul Klee, *Tagebücher von Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Calagne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1957).

75 *Ibid.*, #951.

76 *Ibid.*

77 *Ibid.*, #1008.

78 *Ibid.*

79 *Ibid.*

80 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), 187c, 187e.

81 Klee, “Creative Credo,” 78.

82 Merleau-Ponty, *Eye and Mind*, 147; *L’œil et l’esprit*, 86.

83 Klee, “On Modern Art,” 13.

84 *Ibid.*, 14. Cited by Merleau-Ponty in *La philosophie aujourd’hui*, in *Notes de cours*, 56n4.

85 Franz Kafka, *The Metamorphosis*, in *The Metamorphosis and Other Stories*, trans. Malcolm Pasley (New York: Penguin Books, 1992), 64.

86 Klee, *Diaries*, #67, #152.

87 By the time young Paul Klee was eleven years old, he was a good enough violinist to play as an extra with the Bern symphony and eventually be a



Fig. 4: Paul Klee, *Kettledrummer (Paukenspieler)*, 1940/270. Colored paste on paper on cardboard, 34.6 x 21.2 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

Thus, it is not surprising that Klee studied deeply the interrelations between painting and music and produced the most musical paintings of the twentieth century.⁸⁸ Sometimes Klee painted musicians: pianists, singers, harpists, kettledrummers. Sometimes he incorporated elements of musical notation: notes, staves, key signatures, and the fermata. More often he deployed the structural elements of music as pictorial elements in his paintings: tone, harmony, sonority, polyphony, and rhythm, above all, pictorial rhythm. Klee painted *Kettledrummer* (fig. 4) in the last year of his life and it brings together all of his accumulated mastery of color, line, and depth. It is a broad-brush, red, orange, and black abstraction of the arms and face of a tympanist performing the crashing notes of the kettledrums at the end of Mozart's Requiem,

second violinist with the City of Bern Orchestra. The woman he married, Lily Stumpf, was a pianist who supported the family by giving piano lessons while Paul struggled to master painting in their early years together. Cf. Andrew Kogan, *Paul Klee: Art and Music* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 20–21.

88 The celebrated musiclicity of Klee's art is one of the qualities that has most captured the imagination of the public (Kogan, *Paul Klee*, 21). Gilles Deleuze has stated that Klee is the most musiclicity of painters (Deleuze, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi [Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987], 303).

a consummate blend of music and painting.⁸⁹

Indeed, it was both polyphony and pictorial rhythm that entered most deeply into Klee's aesthetic thinking and picture making, derived from his love for the early eighteenth-century works of Bach and Mozart. "Mozart and Bach are more modern than the nineteenth century," Klee wrote. "Polyphonic painting is superior to music in that, here, the time element becomes a spatial element. The notion of simultaneity stands out even more richly."⁹⁰ *Polyphonic Architecture (polyphone Architektur)*, 1930, found in the exhibition here (plate 62) presents overlapping "voices" of color planes from the cooler red-pink colors and dark framing planes along the perimeter into the center's warmly "singing" orange. And there, at the center, we find a gently floating architectural drawing composed like the lines of a musical score Andrew Kogan has suggested that perhaps Klee was envisioning an opera house such as we find in other "operatic" paintings. The overall effect of the picture is the presentation of musical-theatrical polyphony and Kogan has written that it is Klee's "very finest performance among his small-scale combinations of polyphonic color and line."⁹¹

We find an example of what Klee means by pictorial translation of music in volume one of the pedagogical Notebooks. It is the translation of a sonata for piano and violin by J. S. Bach, no. 6 in G Major, consisting of a three-part passage, or polyphony in three lines or voices, and Klee executes the musical theme pictorially for each of the voices for each bar or measure. Each voice is represented first by a quantitative length of line corresponding to short lines for the quick sixteenth, thirty-second, and sixty-fourth notes in the upper registers and longer lines for the more sustaining eighth and quarter notes in the lower register. Each of the lines is then interpreted qualitatively as a certain thinness or thickness to represent the dynamic of each voice, whether soft or loud. Finally, crescendos and decrescendos appear as the increasing and decreasing angles of each of the lines, an opening angle to express increasing volume and a closing one to express diminishing volume.⁹²

As examples of Klee's approach, we might consider *Fugue in Red (Fuge in Rot)*, 1921, or *Heroic Strokes of the Bow (heroische Bogenstriche)*, 1938, also sometimes translated as *Heroic Fiddling*. *Fugue in Red* is a watercolor that vibrates or reverberates

89 The theme of music and painting in Klee has a long history in both the academic and art worlds. It has been the subject of full-length books by Andrew Kogan in the 1980s and Hajo Dürching in the 1990s, and Klee was included in a mid-1980s Stuttgart exhibition that engaged in a comprehensive survey of the relations between music and the visual arts in the twentieth century. The theme was also the subject of a stand-alone exhibition titled *Klee et la musique* at the Pompidou Center in Paris in 1985–86, and the Zentrum Paul Klee organized an exhibition titled *Paul Klee—Melody and Rhythm* in 2006–07. The composer, Gunther Schuller, has created a symphonic work for full orchestra titled *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee* (1959) offering musical interpretations in separate movements for seven Klee paintings including *The Twittering Machine (Die Zwitscher-Maschine)* (1922), *Abstract Trio (Abstracter Terzett)* (1923), and the monumental *Ancient Harmony (Alter Klang)* (1927). Cf. Gunther Schuller, *Seven Studies on Themes of Paul Klee* (London: Universal Edition, 1962).

90 Klee, *Diaries*, #1081.

91 Kogan, *Paul Klee*, 117.

92 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 285–87.

as gradual changes in color ranging from pink to violet spread across the work arranged as on four staves, repeated like the full steps and half steps of a chromatic musical scale. *Heroic Strokes of the Bow*, painted as an homage to great violin playing,⁹³ presents a background of deep blue approaching violet against which appear in black the down-strokes of the violin bow in varying thicknesses to express dynamic energy and volume from very soft (*pianissimo*) to very loud (*fortissimo*). Other musical elements take their place alongside the flying bow. We find a repetition and variation on many of these elements in the work from the same year titled *The Gray Man and the Coast* (*der Graue und die Küste*). In the exhibition here are many works that similarly incorporate musical elements: *Musical Ghost* (*Musikalisches Gespenst*) (1940; plate 38), *From Gliding to Rising* (*von Gleiten zu Steigen*) (1923; plate 18), and the lovely *Scherzo with Thirteen* (*Das Scherzo mit der Dreizehn*) (1922; plate 37).

Such works as these play on pictorial rhythm and the analogies between the formal elements of music and those of painting. Klee writes that, "this choice of the formal elements and the mode of their mutual binding, which is limited to a very small range, is analogous to the musical thought between motif and theme."⁹⁴ Some of these analogies might include the line, which is also a melody, thickness of line that is weight or dynamic ranging from the *pianissimo* to the double *forte*, and arrows of varying length and angles that are crescendos and decrescendos. Color is musical intonation, whether sweet and gentle or harsh and edgy. In painting, there is color harmony, contrast, and opposition just as in music there is harmony in the chords and counterpoint in the voices.

Now to come directly to our point about metamorphosis and music, to speak of nature and art in terms of formal rules is to cast Nature as a natural "order," exemplified in the great astronomical regularities governed by rules or laws that compel the same event or pattern in all instances and under all circumstances. This amounts to nothing more than a mechanical reproduction under the compulsion of a formula that does not allow for spontaneity, variation, and creativity in nature. There must be something within the repetition that magnetizes and focuses our attention, some element of life and variation that bestows upon the duplication a difference of quality or rhythm that exceeds sheer quantitative sameness, which would be lifeless and dull. Nature exceeds mere natural order, for nature is filled with endless variation and differences even within the order to which it is compelled. Within the rules are found a variety of rhythms, and within the rhythms are deviations. Klee says that, "rhythms in nature become truly individual in the figurative sense when their parts take on a character that goes beyond the rhythmic, where there is an overlapping of planes...polyphonic interpenetration."⁹⁵ He adds that irregularity, defined as a "deviation from the constructive norm," such as occurs in the palm-leaf umbrella, means "greater

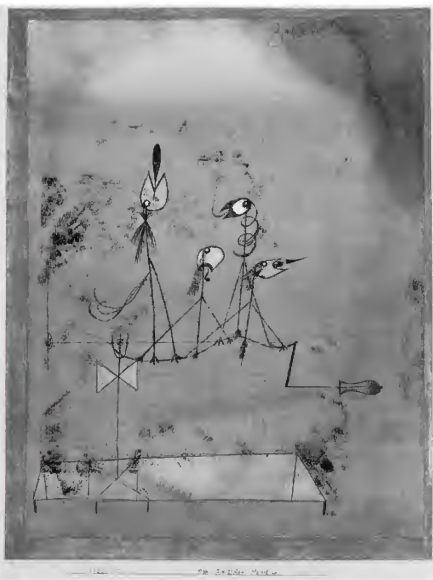


Fig. 5: Paul Klee, *The Twittering Machine* (*Die Zwischer-Maschine*), 1922/151. Oil transfer drawing, watercolor, and ink on paper with gouache and ink borders on board, 64.1 x 48.3 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, NY, Purchase, \$64,1939.

freedom without transgressing the law."⁹⁶ The artist is "led to the upper ways by yearning to free ourselves from earthly bonds; by swimming and flying, we free ourselves from constraint in pure mobility."⁹⁷ Adolf Portmann has captured this blending of rules and rhythms in his concept of metamorphosis: "The growth of the plant from seed to seed stands before us in an exemplary fashion in the annual flowering plant, and enables us to form an idea of the inner law governing formation: in the course of the development of the axis of a shoot, lateral appendages follow rhythmically according to definite rules."⁹⁸

Thus, when Klee spoke of the "Canon of Color Totality," the term "canon" is to be understood, not only as a general principle or rule, which it is, but Klee also meant the word "canon" musically, as in Pachelbel's well-known Canon in D Major. Klee wrote that the "Canon of Color" "permits us to follow the three-part movement" from the three primary colors as the first voices, to their complements, to the tertiary colors on the periphery. "The voices come in successively as in a canon. At each of the three main points one voice reaches its climax, another voice softly begins, and a third dies away. One might call this new figure the canon of totality."⁹⁹ In a work such as Klee's *The Twittering*

⁹³ Jean-Louis Ferrier tells us that it is painted as homage to Klee's friend, the great violinist, Adolf Busch [Ferrier, *Paul Klee* [Paris: Finest SA/ Pierre Terrail Editions, 2001], 40].

⁹⁴ Klee, "On Modern Art," 12.

⁹⁵ Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 85.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁹⁷ Klee, "Ways of Studying Nature," 67.

⁹⁸ Portmann, "Goethe and the Concept of Metamorphosis," 135.

⁹⁹ Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 489.



Fig. 6: Paul Klee, *Sea-Snail King (Meerschnecken-König)*, 1933/279. Watercolor and oil on primed muslin on plywood, 28.4 x 42.6 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

Machine (Die Zwitscher-Maschine) (1922; fig. 5), the birds attached to the mechanical crank as they sing their voices out appear both humorous but also monstrous, for they are anchored to the machine and cannot fly. About this, Stephen Watson has captured the truth about the over-mechanization of art and nature: “As playful as the birds of *The Twittering Machine* might appear, they are equally monstrous. If they sing, they do not fly; they do not escape the forces of gravity. Their legs remain bound to the machine.”¹⁰⁰ *Concert on the Branch (Konzert auf dem Zweig)*, from the previous year (plate 40) appears much the same to me.

In *Nature*, Merleau-Ponty considers the blending of the aesthetic features of nature with adaptation by turning to the biology of Jacob von Uexküll and Adolf Portmann among others for alternative formulations of the concept of nature. In the second lecture course “The Concept of Nature” (1957–58), on animality, Merleau-Ponty adopted Uexküll’s account of the relationship between the animal and its *Umwelt* as the playing or singing of a melody. The milieu should be understood, Uexküll claims, much more in terms of “a melody that is singing itself.”¹⁰¹ For a melody, there is a relation of parts and wholes such that there is a reciprocal influence of the notes upon one another and the first note is only possible because of the last, and vice versa. The biology of Adolf Portmann asks that we attend to the exterior of the animal with its secondary qualities such as color and aesthetic patterning. “The exterior gives the impression of a product of art.”¹⁰² Portmann argues this is less true in the “lower animal,” such as the spiraled mollusk, where the richness of exterior form is mechanically engendered, though Klee was able to produce works of great beauty such as *Sea-Snail King (Meerschnecken-König)* (1933; fig. 6), by concentrating graphic attention on the lines of the snail’s shell, like the unfurling spiral of a blossoming flower. In higher animals, the expressive capacity is greater and the body becomes a manner of expression. For example, the pat-

tern of the zebra’s skin is unique to each individual zebra like the fingerprints of the human hand. Merleau-Ponty wrote: “Life is not only an organization for survival; there is in life a prodigious flourishing of forms, the utility of which is only rarely attested to and that sometimes even constitutes a danger.”¹⁰³ This defense of the aesthetic properties of nature irreducible to mechanism leads Merleau-Ponty explicitly to revise Xavier Bichat’s definition of life: “Life is not ‘the ensemble of functions that resist death,’ to use Bichat’s expression, but rather is a power to invent the visible.”¹⁰⁴ In another passage, Merleau-Ponty says “we must understand life as the opening of a field of action.”¹⁰⁵

We most commonly think of rhythm in a musical context as the pacing, pulse, and sometimes syncopation of the percussion played by the drumbeat or in the bass notes of the cello, string bass, bass guitar, the bass voices of the brass, or the piano’s bass notes. In musical composition rhythm is denoted by the time signature in a musical score—1 time, 2 time, and 3 time. This latter was the rhythm of the triptych that Paul Klee deployed in the aesthetic topography of *Rhythmical (Rhythmisches)* 1930, which sets vibrating horizontal rows of alternating fields of black, then gray, then white, all painted on a background of brown, and of *Rhythmical, Stricter and Freer (rhythmisches strenger und freier)*, also from 1930, presenting horizontal rows of alternating fields of purple, black, gray, and red—four colors—but each occurring in groupings of three, both of these paintings thus expressing the rhythm of the three-beat bar in 3 time signature. Nevertheless, rhythm expands beyond its common musical context by leaps and bounds, for rhythm is vibration, rhythm is movement, rhythm is energy, rhythm is power, rhythm is life. Rhythm is the beating of the heart that reaches all the way to the pulsing in the ears, forehead, and other peripheries of the body: hands, fingers, feet, and toes. Already in *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty had connected life with rhythm: “My life is made up of rhythms which have not their reason in what I have chosen to be, but their condition in the humdrum setting which is mine. Thus there appears round our personal existence a margin of almost impersonal existence, which can be practically taken for granted, and which I rely on to keep me alive.”¹⁰⁶ This rhythm of life in a margin of “almost impersonal existence” is what Merleau-Ponty names our “anonymous body” or self that keeps us alive without and beyond our choosing; it is not our reason for living but our condition for being alive. As we have remembered the pulse of the heartbeat, we now remember as well the other rhythms of our embodiment, rhythms of copulation, pregnancy, childbirth, and the very rhythms of breathing itself.

The etymology of rhythm shows that it is a graphic variant of “rhyme” that occurred in the 1640s through the 1670s, and its meaning was originally the same as rhyme, as in a rhyming or rhymed verse. Gradually, the meaning of rhythm expanded figu-

100 Stephen H. Watson, *Crescent Moon over the Rational: Philosophical Interpretations of Paul Klee* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 129–30.

101 Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 173; *La Nature*, 228.

102 *Ibid.*, 187; 244.

103 *Ibid.*, 186; 243.

104 *Ibid.*, 190; 248.

105 *Ibid.*, 173; 227.

106 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), 84. French original: *Phénoménologie de la perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), 99.

ratively within verse or poetry to include a kind of metrical movement as determined by the relation of long and short, stressed and unstressed, syllables in a line.¹⁰⁷

Thus, through rhythm, it comes about that language, and metered language, takes a central position in the philosophy of nature and art. The voice of the poet is rhythm; the voice is form. The voice is also sound and, as relationships between and among sounds, voice is made melody.

In the poetry of his titles, the formal researches of his botany and biology, the lines, forms, and colors of his art, and the turn toward his own "cool" romantic philosophy, Klee became the exemplary researcher who was able to unite the poetic, scientific, artistic, and philosophical. He forged linkages among botany, biology, music, poetry, and philosophy theretofore unknown, and central to these consummate achievements was the concept of metamorphosis. All of this had a vast impact on the mature philosophy of art, philosophy of nature, and ontology of Merleau-Ponty. This creative outpouring that we see and study in retrospect, Klee searched and researched in prospect, somewhat in the dark, searching for that light and vision. As he wrote in "Creative Credo": "Art plays in the dark with ultimate things and yet it reaches them."¹⁰⁸ ■

107 Cf. *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, Complete Text Reproduced Micrographically, Volume 2: P-Z* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 636.

108 Klee, "Creative Credo," 80.

Günter Figal

Pictorial Spaces: The Art of Paul Klee

For A. M. E. S.

1.

In thinking of the rich variety of Klee's art, recollecting the pictures once seen in museums, exhibitions, or reproduced in books, only one conclusion seems to be appropriate: there can be no general conception of Klee's art. There are hand-sized sheets of paper marked with only a few pencil or pen lines; watercolors with intensely-hued traces of pigment; canvases or other cloths, some of them in layers and affixed on wooden plates or cardboards, covered with different kinds of paint; schemes of animals, known and unknown; human beings and angels; also irregular squares, lines in repetition, in parallel rows; and again and again signs—arrows, letters, and numbers embedded in their surroundings. Every work is an individual, definitively different from all others. These pictures are not representatives of a unique "style." Nevertheless they are recognized as "Klees" at first glance.

The possibility of this recognition cannot be rooted in the very individuality of Klee's pictures. Their distinctiveness lets them mainly be different; as individuals they are not obviously related to each other or even assembled as a unique artistic work. They must have something in common, something unifying that makes them different from all other individual pictures. Their commonality, however, is not obvious; it is not immediately visible, and it does not emerge whenever the pictures are compared with each other. Some of them may be alike, but there are no general similarities, or even family likenesses, that bind them together in a complex net of relations. These pictures, indeed, have something in common. But what binds or holds them together essentially is, as it seems, hidden. In recognizing a Klee one understands a source for all these images that is not just the artist's imagination. Imagination can also produce pictures of a similar kind.

Klee himself supported such a view of his art. In the first of the lectures Klee held as a teacher at the Bauhaus in 1921 and 1922 he describes art "in respect to the phases of its origination." He explains origination as "Genesis," referring to the first book of the Bible and its concern with the "creation of the world." As Klee adds, in the narrative of God's creation of the world, the world as a whole surrounding us is historically structured.¹ This is decisive. What Klee has in mind for his lectures is also a historical structuring, but one that pertains to "working practitioners" and is therefore naturally and primarily concerned with the realm of forms.² Art emerges with its own forms—not with the forms that are to be discovered in the world.

1 Paul Klee, *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formenlehre* [facsimile reproduction], ed. Jürgen Glaesemer (Basel: Schwabe, 1979), 13–14: "Eine besondere Art der Analyse ist die Untersuchung des Werkes auf die Stadien seiner Entstehung hin. Diese Art bezeichne ich mit dem Wort Genesis. Das erste Buch Moses, das sich mit der Erschaffung der Welt befasst, wird auch die Genesis genannt. Es steht da geschrieben, was Gott am ersten Tag schuf, was am zweiten und so weiter. Das uns umgebende Weltganze erfährt eine historische Gliederung."

2 *Ibid.*, 14: "Wir sind Bildner, werktätige Praktiker, und werden uns hier daher naturgemäss auf vorzugsweise formalem Gebiet bewegen."

According to Klee even the most precise scientific knowledge of nature—of plants and animals, of the earth and its history—is of no use if the “armamentarium” for its presentation (*Darstellung*) is lacking.³ Presentation, then, is not essentially oriented to something presentable; it does not necessarily refer to something in order to let it indirectly be present. It has its own genesis, and only with this genesis can it become intelligible. Accordingly, things presentable are not merely depicted when presented—they are generated by the very genesis of presentation. Or, as Klee says in his programmatic text, “Creative Credo” published in 1920, “Art does not reproduce the visible, but it makes visible.”⁴ This statement is confirmed by a drawing from 1926, which is entitled *To Make Visible* (*sichtbar machen*) (plate 59). A face emerges, as if it were surfacing from a scale or between steep paths. It emerges from the lines of the picture, just as its title, which like a headline is written next to the face, ironically underlining and abrogating the programmatic character of the drawing. There is no program for true art, except every artwork itself is the program—the prescription that is immediately fulfilled by the artwork itself.

Klee extensively and didactically described the genesis of pictorial forms in his Bauhaus lectures. One year before, in his programmatic essay, he did the same in a more concentrated and also more playful way. He imagines the genesis of the formal elements of graphic art as a journey to the “land of better cognition,” starting with the “dead point,” getting to the first mobile act, namely, the line. Soon there is a stop, to take a breath, and the result is a line interrupted or a line structured by many stops. Then the structure of lineaments becomes more and more complex, and accordingly the graphic elements attract meanings. A sequence of arcs is a bridge, a plane with lines drawn through it is a plowed field, a zigzag line is a flash of lightning, with a sowing of points one has the stars. Parallel lines that, after some time, deviate from each other, show first agreement and then difference, and thereby expression, dynamics, the psyche of the line.⁵

According to Klee, the meaning of lines and figures formed by lines is not due to something that functions as a model for drawing; lines and figures as such have a meaning, parallel to the meaning of things in the world, but also deviating from it. As Klee says, art in its relation to the Creation is a “simile”; it is an “example,” just as the terrestrial is a cosmic example.⁶ Art is an example because it is part of Creation, just as the earth is part of the cosmos. But as a simile of Creation, art is more than an integral part of the created world. Rather it is creation itself. If art essentially makes visible, then it is the creation of visibility.

Because Klee understands art as creation, he also stresses the temporal character of art. He questions the distinction between temporal and spatial arts that Lessing made in his observations on the Laocoön sculpture (*Laocoön*, 1766), and, in contradiction

to Lessing, Klee asserts that space is also a temporal concept. As Klee writes, it is movement that underlies every becoming,⁷ and it is art that brings this underlying movement to the surface. A work of art is primarily genesis, and never is it experienced as product.⁸

Klee substantiates this assumption in two respects. He points to the process of drawing or painting and also to the process of experiencing a picture. As Klee stresses, pictures are constructed bit by bit, and in this way they are not different from houses. Those experiencing the art will not absorb it all at once because such contemplation needs time.⁹ Despite this, a picture cannot be reduced to its temporal character. Klee indicates this when he calls a picture a “fixed movement” (*festgelegte Bewegung*).¹⁰ In a drawing or painting the movement of a pencil or brush is as if frozen; a line in a picture does not move. All works are what only some of them are called: still lifes.

This does not refute Klee’s reflections on the temporal character of art. Though a picture is as such non-temporal, it is not absolutely detached from time and from temporal experience. Rather it opens up movement by fixing it; a fixed movement is recognizable as a former movement and thus can be rediscovered. One can follow a fixed line and thereby understand the movement of the artist’s pencil or brush. The fixed line is like a path that can be taken. Or to say it in Klee’s words: “There are established paths in the artwork for the beholder’s eye that scans like a grazing animal.”¹¹ As one may add, there are not only paths but also traffic signs, like the arrows that can be found in Klee’s paintings.¹²

Paths, however, are always ambiguous. If there is more than one, no clear direction is indicated. One can take this direction, but also another one; one can take no path at all, but rather contemplate the network of paths as a network of possibilities. A picture is like that. Different points of view can be taken, but none of them will give the viewer an exclusive path since the picture as a whole is in view. The work of art could not be experienced fully otherwise.

Explaining his conception of pictures as fixed movements, Klee takes this into account. In this sense he speaks of “movement and countermovement,” which, as he says, is identical with “objective contrasts” or with “divided colored contrasts.” If a picture is such a balance of pictorial elements or forces, there is more at stake than just movement. Klee calls this “the simultaneous integration of forms, movement, and countermovement,” and, stating the general task of pictorial art, he adds: “Every energy demands a complement, in order to achieve a state resting in itself that is mounted on the play of powers.”¹³ According to Klee

3 Ibid.

4 Paul Klee, “Beitrag für den Sammelband: ‘Schöpferische Konfession,’” in *Schriften: Rezensionen und Aufsätze*, ed. Christian Geelhaar (Cologne: DuMont, 1976), 118.

5 Ibid., 118–19.

6 Ibid., 122. See also Paul Klee, *Tagebücher 1898–1918* [Textkritische Neuedition], ed. Wolfgang Kersten (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 1988), #1008.

7 Klee, “Schöpferische Konfession,” 119: “Bewegung liegt allem Werden zugrunde.”

8 Ibid., 120: “Auch ein Kunstwerk ist in erster Linie.”

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.: “Dem gleich einem weidenden Tier abtastenden Auge des Beschauers sind im Kunstwerk Wege eingerichtet.”

12 For the meaning of arrows in Klee’s work, see Christian Geelhaar, *Paul Klee und das Bauhaus* (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1972), 50–53.

13 Klee, “Schöpferische Konfession,” 121: “Jede Energie erheischt ein Complement, um einen in sich selber ruhenden, über dem Spiel der Kräfte gelagerten Zustand zu verwirklichen.”

this state is the true equivalent of Creation: "Out of abstract formal elements, by means of their unification as concrete beings or as abstract things like numbers or letters, finally a formal cosmos is created that is so similar to the Great Creation that it takes only a breath to realize the expression of the religious as well as religion."¹⁴

This result of Klee's reflections is quite surprising. Though Klee's intention first was to explain his understanding of art as a simile of Creation by characterizing the picture as movement, his explication of movement in the picture leads him finally to the conception of the picture as rest, according to which rest is not just an intermediate state of movement. Rest in Klee's sense is not contrary to movement but rather encompasses it; rest is the balance between movement and countermovement and thus beyond both of them.

Klee's transition from movement to rest, however, is consistent. If movement is fixed in a work, the work itself must be the ground for this fixation so that, as a picture, it cannot be movement at all. And if there is more than one fixed movement in a work, the picture as such is not fixed movement, but rather a network of fixed movements. It is the foundation upon which such a network is possible. The enabling of this network makes pictures similes of Creation, insofar as the created world is the cosmos in the strict sense of the Greek word; creation is *beautiful order*. Only as resting within itself can a picture be a *microcosm* parallel to the *macrocosm* of "the Great Creation."

But the structure of fixed movements is no sufficient reason for a work of art to be a simile of Creation. As structured, a picture may appear as a result, as something created that may remind one of creation, but is not creation itself. In order to be similar to creation, a picture must have a character comparable to the process of creation without, as a picture, being a process at all.

Klee's answer to this possibility is in his diary. A 1916 entry gives an extensive and detailed account of Klee's self-conception as an artist. According to this entry, Klee does not understand his art as specifically "human." It is not motivated by a "passionate kind of humanity," and it is no expression of an "earthly heartiness." It is not to articulate human affections, but rather to go beyond that: "I dissolve myself in the Whole, and then I am fraternally on par with the next and all earthly neighbors."¹⁵ Here, Klee describes his attempt to abandon a specifically human perspective. His art does not depict elements as determined by this perspective; it does not relate to human affections and aims, nor is his art within the realm of human understanding. Klee's art is supposed to discover the ground out of which specific forms of life, including human life, emerge; everything must not be regarded in its distinctiveness—as if it were independently there, a fully developed individual that can be characterized or even defined in

its essence. Klee's art reduces everything to its very possibility and, thereby, conceives it and makes visible its essential involvement with everything else. Everything is seen as belonging to "the Whole," being not so much a distinctive part but rather a possibility of it, something that emerges from "the Whole," and that can be understood in the possibility of its emergence insofar as it is bound to everything else that is of the same original kind, of the same original possibility. Or, in his own words: "I am seeking a more remote point [of view], a point more original in the sense of creation, where I divine a kind of formula for animals, plants, the human being, earth, fire, water, air, and all circling powers at the same time."¹⁶

2.

Klee's more remote point (of view) is not somewhere on earth, not even in the universe. Earth and air—the density and firmness of the earth as well as the openness of the sky—can neither be a foundation nor a lofty perspective for the more original view because they are encompassed by this view; they are original possibilities of creation. The artist himself cannot provide the artistic point (of view) as conceived by Klee either. The artist is a human being; his view is human. By dissolving himself however, he has abandoned the human perspective. He has become an artist, thinking in points, lines, and planes, and thinking in colors. These are not the artist's "means" that he uses in order to produce pictures. Rather points, lines, planes, and colors are the elements of the artist, as water is the element for a fish. "Color possesses me," Klee writes in his diary, one day on his trip to Tunisia in 1914, "I don't have to pursue it. It will possess me always, I know it. That is the meaning of this happy hour: Color and I are one. I am a painter."¹⁷ This holds true for the element of visual possibility in every respect.

Points, lines, planes, and color can be experienced all over the world. The world insofar as it is visible is color, and in color, points, lines, and planes can emerge. In the visible world, everything is too perfect even in its imperfection, too distinct, and too strictly separated from everything else. The "kind of formula" the artist seeks can only be found if the element of visual possibility as such can be experienced. This however is only the case in art. For an artist, points, lines, planes, and color are not just given so that attention may be paid to them or not. With art, they are there; they belong to the potential of art, to a whole of elementary possibilities that are realized as possibilities in painting and drawing.

The potential of art is bound to visibility. It is not given in imagination or conception, as if the artist would first have the potential in mind and then realize it on paper or canvas with pencils or brushes. Points, lines, and planes in art are not what they are in geometry; color is no matter of fact describable in physics. In

14 Ibid.: "Aus abstrakten Formelementen wird über ihre Vereinigung zu konkreten Wesen oder zu abstrakten Dingen wie Zahlen und Buchstaben hinaus zum Schluß ein formaler Kosmos geschaffen, der mit der großen Schöpfung solche Ähnlichkeit aufweist, daß ein Hauch genügt, den Ausdruck des Religiösen, die Religion zur Tat werden zu lassen."

15 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #1007: "Ich löse mich ins Ganze auf und stehe dann auf einer brüderlichen Stufe zum nächsten, zu allen irdischen Nachbarn."

16 Ibid., #1008: "Ich suche...einen entlegeneren, schöpfungsrungsprünglicheren Punkt, wo ich eine Art Formel ohne für Tier, Pflanze, Mensch, Erde, Feuer, Wasser, Luft und alle kreisenden Kräfte."

17 Ibid., #926: "Die Farbe hat mich. Ich brauche nicht nach ihr zu haschen. Sie hat mich für immer, ich weiss das. Das ist der glücklichen Stunde Sinn: Ich bin Maler."

drawing and painting, points and lines are always to be drawn or painted; they are what they are only with respect to graphite, ink, watercolor, or oil paint. The potential of art is the potential of pictures—on paper, on canvas, or on other kinds of cloth. The artist's thinking is essentially bound to experimenting with different materials.

The potential of art is there in every drawing or painting. But not every artist lets drawings and paintings be manifestations of the elementary possibilities of art. Klee does. Dissolving himself in "the Whole," he submerges himself in the material potential of drawing and painting, in order to let this potential show itself in his pictures.

This begins with the material quality of Klee's works.¹⁸ Many of them are not just "on paper" or "on canvas," but are built up in complex layers. For example, the catalogue description of *Ad Marginem* (1930, reworked 1935–36) reads: "Watercolor on varnish priming on cardboard nailed on a stretcher, white priming with traces of color verso; stretcher covered with gauze."¹⁹ Klee did not often work in "classical" techniques. He combined watercolor and colored paste, tempera and chalk, oil and watercolor; he used different primers such as egg or gypsum. He applied color to these primers and occasionally scratched them, so that some paintings appear cuneiform-like. He also cut his works into pieces and conglutinated them into new configurations.

The different materials Klee would use interact in a way that is not predictable; they cannot be subordinated to any representative intention, but create their own effects. Klee particularly liked to use colored paste, which differs in tone and quality when applied to various groundings, generating contingent effects. Yet Klee's concern is not contingency. Rather he wants his pictures to be substantial; they are to appear thing-like. Many of Klee's pictures have almost tactile surfaces; they are wooden, earthy in different tones; like sand, like velvet or have the glaze of mosaics; they are coarse like rocks or even cloudy and hazy. Nevertheless these surfaces are not for touching, but for seeing. They are over there, over there, at some distance; otherwise they could not be contemplated at all. But they are not illusionary stages, on which something is to be seen, not neutral backgrounds for the appearance of something. The paintings mostly do not have foreground and background. So they are not mere optical phenomena; rather they encounter the beholder. They are seen in their substantiality, without being only things. They are *pregnant* things, potentials of appearance and appearing as such potentials. They are intensely present in what can be called their *texture*. This is their dense, somehow structured, but not clearly-ordered quality.²⁰ Texture can appear transparent, as in *From Gliding to Rising* (von Gleiten zu Steigen) (1923; plate 18) or enigmatically closed like in *A Gate* (ein Tor) (1939; plate 45). According to

his diary, Klee discovered texture for the first time at the age of nine. Recollecting his early years, he remembers the tables in his uncle's restaurant with their ground and polished marble tabletops whose surfaces revealed cross-sections of entangled fossils. Klee adds that one could find in them grotesque human figures and trace them with a pencil.²¹ As an artist Klee has done something similar with the pregnant surfaces of his pictures. Klee's pictures are intensely textual because of their potentiality.

But the potential of Klee's pictures is not only textual. What can be identified in Klee's pictures has the character of potentiality also in itself. In Klee's mature art there is never a complete scheme of something that, more or less detailed, could just be understood as the scheme of this something—whether it is an angel, a human figure or face, an animal, a plant, or a thing. What is rather to be seen is an open configuration of points, lines, and planes. Insofar as it is a configuration, it can be called the *text* of the picture; it is its more or less distinctive and more or less consistent order.²² But because of their openness, the orders of Klee's pictures mostly are as much *writings* as they are texts. In the rhythm of writing, the order of lines is often seen. They swing or they are neatly set one by one.

Writings as referred to here are not just fixations of texts that could also be fixed otherwise, so that writing, at least to some degree, would be contingent. It is rather the possibility of fixation as such that is dominant, and writing in this context is not restricted to language. There is language, written language, in Klee's pictures, as in his drawing *To Make Visible* (plate 59). But written words in a work become parts of it; they can be read, but primarily are seen as textual elements among others. The textual elements of the works in general are there only as they are written, but writing is not submissive to them. Writing is there as writing—as lines, repeated and variegated in other lines, as lines outlining a figure and at the same time disintegrating it. In some of Klee's late works, thick dark lines, very different from the delicate, almost fading lines in earlier pictures, are interlooped so that figures share contours and are mixed up with each other as in a rebus.²³ Klee's drawings are especially pertinent to the study of his writing; they could even be called an encyclopedia of writing. There is minimal scribbling that seems to be blown together by wind like the *Medley of Little People* (*allerlei kleines Volk*) (1932; plate 29); there are compact forms constituted by only a few contouring lines like the ambivalent, perhaps metamorphosing one that is called *More Bird* (*mehr Vogel*) (1939); there are graceful ornaments that gather to form *Little Tree* (*Bäumchen*) (1935; plate 9); there are dense ravels of chalk or pencil lines, evoking scenes of brutal violence and murder (plates 46–54); there are neat repetitions constructing *City of Cathedrals* (*Stadt der Kathedralen*) (1927; plate 66), and open configurations of proto-signs, which cover and structure the whole sheet of paper—as in *Uneven Flight* (*unebene Flucht*) (1939; plate 14).

It is the textual potentiality and the writing potential of Klee's

18 For a detailed description of Klee's technique, see Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1954), 151–52.

19 Matthias Bärman, ed., *Paul Klee: Tod und Feuer; die Erfüllung im Spätwerk*, exh. cat. (Riehen/Basel: Fondation Beyeler; Wabern/Bern: Benteli, 2003), 179.

20 For the notion of texture, see Figal, *Erscheinungsdinge: Ästhetik als Phänomenologie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 222–23.

21 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #27.

22 For the notion of text, see Figal, *Erscheinungsdinge*, 161–64.

23 As an especially fine example, note *Forest Witches* (*Wald-Hexen*) (1938).

pictures that make them smiles of generation. As smiles they are not generation itself, nor do they depict nor imitate it. The pictures are like generation, because they have the originality of something immediately generated. What is there as a picture and in a picture appears as if it had just come to the surface; it has appeared in an emphatic way. It is not the result of standard production following predetermined rules and techniques. Whereas the products of such techniques can be traced back to the conditions of their becoming as to their possibility, Klee's pictures are not the realizations of predetermined possibility but they are possible as such. Admittedly, Klee's works have this in common with all true works of art, but making something visible that has not ever been seen before augments their essential possibility. Even if no identifiable scheme is discovered in them, Klee's pictures make visible something. Although Klee admired Kandinsky,²⁴ his own pictures are not "abstract"; they are not reduced to mere color or mere configurations of lines. They bring a visibility that shows something as how it truly is for the first time. As Klee says in his essay "On Modern Art," for the artist creation is never finished; it continues, just as it has ever continued before. The artist extends Creation from the past to the future, thereby imparting durability to it.²⁵ The artist accordingly varies and develops further forms to be found in nature because he is not bound to factually given forms, he is able to seek their inherent essential possibility. In distancing himself from depicting, his orientation shifts "from modeled image to primordial image."²⁶

Original images are individuals, and as individuals they cannot be subsumed under concepts, but must be named. Klee's titles are names in this sense. They do not indicate what has been depicted nor do they explain what is seen to ease the viewer's understanding. Klee's titles, some of them one-line poems, even shorter than haiku, name the picture itself and thereby also what has been made visible by it. This is especially significant with titles that name states, like *Ad Marginem* or *From Gliding to Rising*. Every picture is a visible possibility, and as such it is an original picture. Though art, as Klee describes it, can impart durability to Creation only in an unceasing exploration of the possible, every picture as such must be an "original image," bringing about the original possibility of what is made visible. Every picture is original without being in process and thus being in time.

Klee pursued his reflections on art in this direction, and he did so in tacit opposition to his "Creative Credo." Whereas Klee in this essay conceived space as temporal, some years later he instead conceives artistic space as non-reductive. In his 1923 essay "Ways of Studying Nature," he characterizes his art by distancing himself from the kind of artistic natural studies that can easily be identified as relating to impressionism. The concern of these natural studies was the "scrupulously differentiated inves-

tigation of appearance," and this investigation was realized by being especially attentive to the "air space" between the artist's eye and the motif, or, as Klee says, between "Me and You."²⁷ What was made visible by this art was "the surface of the object as filtered by air."²⁸ As Klee stresses, these artistic natural studies are not to be underestimated, but they have to be "extended," because the artist of today is "more than a refined camera"; the artist of today is "more complicated, richer, and more spacious."²⁹

The spatiality of the art of today—and this is of course mainly Klee's own art—is not only due to the air space between the artist and the motif. Rather it goes along with "a more spacious conception of the object." Klee explains this conception as "totalization."³⁰ Objects are not only taken as appearances, but they are "extended" by our knowledge of their "interior." They are "dissected," and their interiors are visualized in cross-sections. What is made visible in this way is, of course, also an appearance, but it is no prima facie appearance as it is given with the naively perceived object. It is an appearance, in which something shows itself as what it is in its phenomenal complexity. It is an original image, and this image is spatial.

Klee does not explain this spatiality further. But, contemplating his works, one can understand it easily. In his pictures, the "objects" Klee speaks of are not depicted (i.e. reproduced in their prima facie appearance), but rather transformed into the writing of lines and in patches or surfaces of color. Everything identifiable appears in the elements of the picture, and thus its pictorial possibility is revealed. This revelation is an extension, a display, a spreading out of lines and colors that allows pictorial appearance.

As an extension, pictorial appearance needs space. It needs an open realm in which the lines and colors can take place, close to each other or at a distance, distinct or almost fused. As Klee writes, "to paint well is simply the following: to put the right color at the right place."³¹ A place is "right" if the line or color can play its particular role in the whole of the picture; it must be there where it complements the other colors and is complemented by them, where it contributes best to the whole appearance which is the picture itself. So it is the picture that demands the right place for every color and for every line. The picture also confirms whether or not a place has been the right one. The picture is the space for everything that belongs to it. Pictures are spatial not in evoking the illusion of space, but in their own material extension that gives places and free space to colors and lines and so to appearance.

Though this holds true for every picture including those that present illusionary spaces, Klee's pictures are eminently spatial. Their spatiality is present not least because illusionary space is absent. The limited textural surface of Klee's works is the par-

24 See Klee, "Die Ausstellung des Modernen Bundes im Kunsthaus Zürich," *Die Alpen* 6 (Aug. 1912), reprinted in *Schriften*, 105–111, esp. 108.

25 Paul Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst* (Bern: Benteli, 1945), 43: "Er viz. der Künstler erlaubt sich dann auch den Gedanken, daß die Schöpfung heute kaum schon abgeschlossen sein könne, und dehnt damit jenes weltchöpferische Tun von rückwärts nach vorwärts. Der Genesis Dauer verleiend."

26 *Ibid.*, 47: "Vom Vorbildlichen zum Urbildlichen!"

27 Klee, "Wege des Naturstudiums," in *Schriften*, 124.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*: "Der heutige Künstler ist mehr als verfeinerte Kamera, er ist komplizierter, reicher und räumlicher."

30 *Ibid.*, 125.

31 "Gut malen ist einfach folgendes: richtige Farbe an richtigen Ort setzen," cited in Geelhaar, *Paul Klee*, 48n31.

tical space of the pictures—a space for colors having found their place and for lines having been inscribed. Many of Klee's paintings even show their spatial character. A painting like *Green Terrain* (*grünes Gelände*) (1938; plate 1) presents what the title says by itself being a "green terrain." *Ad Marginem* shows the limits of the pictorial space that it is by placing all its plant- and animal-like figurines at its edges and by leaving the main space in the middle free for a dominant dark red ball—a sun, perhaps, that rules the cosmos of the painting.³²

Most prominently, however, pictorial spaces are depicted in images that themselves show pictorial spaces. In these works, pictorial space is doubled and in this doubling is reflected visually. Again and again Klee has drawn and painted gardens and carpets.³³ These paintings have a paradigmatic character, because other paintings that do not show gardens and carpets take up and vary their structure. Gardens and carpets are structurally akin; in Islamic art, many carpets represent gardens—not in depicting them, but being a repetition of them structurally.

Gardens are nature contained within nature, representing nature only by limiting it. Gardens are limited spaces in which only some kinds of plants or rocks are put together in a configuration. In such limited spaces, nature is ordered in a certain way, so that the order of nature itself can become intelligible. The order of a garden is not the order of nature as such; it is not unnatural, and can rather be understood as a particular possibility of natural order. Gardens are like cross-section areas of nature, just as Klee's pictures are cross-section areas of Creation—spatial microcosmic possibilities, spaces in space that have originated from the cosmic potential. If, seeing a picture, one immediately knows that it is a Klee, one has probably understood this, even if one is not able to put it into words. But as to pictorial art, words are always late. What can be understood of a picture is in the picture itself. ■

32 [*Composition with Symbols*] [*Composition mit Symbolen*], 1917; plate 11 is quite similar.

33 For examples, see Michael Baumgartner and Marianne Keller, eds., *In Paul Klees Zaubergarten*, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008) and Michael Baumgartner et al., *Auf der Suche nach dem Orient/Paul Klee. Teppich der Erinnerung*, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2009).

Claude Cernuschi

Paul Klee and Language

INTRODUCTION

A celebrated member of Der Blaue Reiter—an avant-garde group centered in Munich before World War I—Paul Klee is often associated with its founding, most active members: Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, pioneers of a modernist brand of abstraction and practitioners of a mystical, religious form of expressionism. This association is not altogether surprising. By emphasizing physical process and gestural execution, and showcasing a fascination with physiognomy, caricature, and non-Western art (as well as the art of children and the insane¹), Klee's work frequently betrays the telltale signs of this all-too-subjective, all-too-recalcitrant movement. Expressionism's cardinal precepts, moreover, are repeatedly given voice in his writings: a celebration of instinct, a deprecation of the intellect,² a raising of art to near-divine status,³ and a tendency to justify formal distortions on the basis of the "higher" truths those very same distortions reveal.⁴

Even so, Klee is an atypical expressionist.⁵ Witty and whimsical, his art betrays qualities incompatible with a movement particular to whose ethos is an uncompromising belief in the extreme urgency and inviolate earnestness of self-expression. Not that Klee was less committed to his vocation than other members of the Blaue Reiter; only that key aspects of his production—e.g., his preference for small scale—bespeaks a more intimate approach to creativity, one unsusceptible to accommodating the grand cataclysmic imagery favored by Marc and Kandinsky before the Great War. Klee was unconventional, to be sure, yet his "unconventionality," as Clement Greenberg remarked, was still that of "an eccentric but respectable bourgeois."⁶ Attracted to satirical humor and biting caricature, he was suspicious of, if not hostile toward, some of the high-minded propensities of his contemporaries. Though not above referencing the mystical, Klee dubbed himself a "neutral creature" devoid of "passionate humanity."⁷ He celebrated the intuitive subjectivity and

- 1 Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), #905: "Children also have artistic ability, and there is wisdom in their having it! The more helpless they are, the more instructive are the examples they furnish us; and they must be preserved free of corruption from an early age. Parallel phenomena are provided by the works of the mentally diseased; neither childish behavior nor madness are insulting words here, as they commonly are."
- 2 *Ibid.*, #290: "The effect of these works [sculptures at the Lateran Klee witnessed during a trip to Italy], which are after all imperfect, cannot be justified on intellectual grounds, and yet I am more receptive to them than to the most highly praised masterpieces."
- 3 *Ibid.*, #155: "I am God. So much of the divine is heaped in me that I cannot die."
- 4 *Ibid.*, #136: "Some will not recognize the truthfulness of my mirror. Let them remember that I am not here to reflect the surface [this can be done with the photographic plate], but must penetrate inside. My mirror probes down to the heart. I write words on the forehead and around the corners of the mouth. My human faces are truer than real ones." See also *ibid.*, #677, #681, #1081, and Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1955), 365, 367, 372.
- 5 See Jean Laude, "Paul Klee: letters, 'écriture,' signes," in *Écritures: Systèmes idéographiques et pratiques expressives*, ed. Anne-Marie Christin and Pierre Amiet (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1982), 355. See also Charles Werner Haxthausen, *Paul Klee: The Formative Years* (New York: Garland, 1981), 365, 430, 431, 475.
- 6 Clement Greenberg, "Art Chronicle: On Paul Klee [1870–1940]," in *Clement Greenberg: The Collected Essays and Criticism, Vol. I: Perceptions and Judgments, 1939–1944*, ed. John O'Brian (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 67.
- 7 Klee, *Diaries*, #1008.



Fig. 1: Egon Schiele (1890–1919), *Self-Portrait as St. Sebastian* (poster for Galerie Arnot), 1914–15. Pen, ink, and gouache on paper, 67 x 50 cm, Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, Vienna.

formal liberties of expressionism, readily acknowledging creativity's mysterious dimension,⁸ but he steered his art in different directions, allowing a certain detachment or calculation to temper expressionism's tendency toward emotional overstatement or affective excess. "Form," he professed, "and not too much feeling."⁹

Klee also stands as an atypical expressionist for another reason: his art's engagement with language. If linguistic elements populate the expressionist landscape—e.g., in the prints of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Erich Heckel, Oskar Kokoschka or Egon Schiele (fig. 1)—these primarily serve advertising or labeling purposes, revealing little of the fragmentation of typography and syntax discernible in, say, cubism, futurism, constructivism, Dadaism, and even surrealism. Hoping to respond meaningfully to the condition of modernity, members of these movements renounced subjective self-expression to undermine semiotic consistency (a notion, ironically enough, sometimes erroneously claimed to be indissolubly fundamental to, if not determinative of, modernism itself). Appropriating formal strategies original to popular culture, where linguistic versus representational boundaries—especially in advertising—were rarely respected, they subjected these

strategies to radical experimentation. Whether a painting should record a visual scene, spell out a linguistic message, or exercise both options simultaneously was no longer clear.

Modernists were equally bent on highlighting the conventionality of language to valorize abstract art. If non-mimetic signs could systematically combine to communicate abstruse ideas or subtle states of mind, so, the reasoning went, could abstract painting and sculpture. On this score, the arbitrariness of language supplied as persuasive a justification for the new art as the frequently touted analogy between painting and music. Paradoxically, language also justified abstraction from the opposite perspective. If the new poetry fragmented syntax and undermined the very coherence of words, then illegibility could be flaunted as a virtue rather than a vice. Rather than stress the capacity of arbitrary signs to convey meaning, poets unhinged the graphic marks or sounds of language from their function as communication. On this account, the purpose of art was not to transfer a specific, decodable message, but to celebrate semantic ambiguity (the Russian linguist Roman Jakobson aptly dubbed this tendency "making strange").

Accordingly, a cursory look at the art of the past century reveals, not simply the persistence, but also the diversity, with which artists engaged the linguistic. In Henry van Velde's initials, one sees symbolism's fascination with script; in Picasso and Braque's canvases, cubism's fascination with fractured words and stenciling techniques; in Marinetti's *Parole in liberta*, futurism's fascination with phonics; in Duchamp's *L.H.O.O.Q.*, Dada's fascination with irony and wordplay; in Stuart Davis's *Odol*, modernism's fascination with brand name recognition; in Magritte's linguistic mismatches, surrealism's fascination with the arbitrariness of the sign; in Andy Warhol's headlines, Pop's fascination with the power of the press; in Roy Lichtenstein's comics, a fascination with narrative and onomatopoeia; in Joseph Kosuth's dictionary definitions, conceptual art's fascination with ideas; in Basquiat's scribbles, postmodernism's fascination with graffiti; in the Starn Twins' *Anne Frank*, a fascination with language's denunciatory power; in Barbara Kruger's *I Shop Therefore I Am*, a fascination with the dominance of consumerism in contemporary culture.

Such diverse references to language in the art of the last century might well confirm Roland Barthes's suspicion that, for all that is said—even today—about the increasing and pervasive power of images, we still exist in a culture of writing.¹⁰ In parallel, though language has preoccupied linguists and philosophers from Plato onward, its study took on added urgency in the

10 This is not to dismiss language's appearance in visual art prior to the twentieth century. One thinks, for example, of the inclusion of "Approche, approche" in *Les très riches heures du Duc de Berry*, by the Limbourg brothers, or of "Ave Maria" in Jan van Eyck's Ghent altarpiece, written upside down so that only God might read it, attest to the power of words, again to cite Barthes, to enhance the communicative aspect of visual images, to anchor meanings that may otherwise be more difficult to construe. Following the Renaissance, however, artists generally avoided incorporating lettering in high art practice, no doubt because the insertion of flat, planar characters undermined the illusion of three-dimensional space so hardly won through modeling, anatomical accuracy, and linear perspective. Predictably, linguistic signs reappear in visual art precisely when those very same devices lose credibility among modernist artists.

8 See Paul Klee, *Notebooks, Volume 2: The Nature of Nature*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Heinz Narden (London: Lund Humphries, 1970), 255.

9 Letter to Lily Stumpf, Feb. 23, 1903 in Paul Klee, *Briefe an die Familie: 1893–1940*, ed. Felix Klee, 2 vols. (Cologne: DuMont, 1979), 1:312.

twentieth century: from Ferdinand de Saussure and C. S. Peirce, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Martin Heidegger, Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir, J. L. Austin and John Searle, Gotlob Frege and Noam Chomsky, to the recent work of Eve Sweetser, Mark Johnson, George Lakoff, Terence Deacon, Steven Pinker, and countless others, language—identified as a unique and defining characteristic of the human species—has proven increasingly central to defining what is human from what is not. Predictably, the history of art reflects this fascination: no less than language, art is a uniquely human form of endeavor.

Locating Klee's place in this frenzy of aesthetic and philosophical activity is no easier than defining it in the expressionist movement. Regarding his everyday working methods and the theoretical underpinnings of his teaching, Klee resisted systemization.¹¹ That said, language played a critical role in his work. To cite Marcel Franciscano: Klee's "basic impulse was graphic,"¹² or Charles Haxthausen: Klee's drawings frequently evoke "qualities of handwriting"¹³ (so much so that the artist's practice was to paint, not standing at an easel, but sitting at a large drawing table).¹⁴ One may add, with James Smith Pierce, that Klee "literally wrote [some of] his pictures,"¹⁵ and, with Greenberg, that, on account of its small scale, his work falls within the dimensional orbit of the book.¹⁶ Not surprisingly, Klee drew considerable inspiration from satiric periodicals such as *Jugend* or *Simplicissimus* during his formative years: "I...wanted to produce illustrations for humor magazines," the artist later admitted.¹⁷ "Only what was forbidden pleased me. Drawing and writing."¹⁸

Tagging the drawing/writing combination as "forbidden" intimates how this merger, tolerated in popular illustration, remained unacceptable in high art. Bent on being provocative, on blurring boundaries,¹⁹ Klee imbued his work with a calligraphic quality, and, throughout his career, was inordinately sensitive to the way language infects the interpretation of art. "All visual art," he declared, "starts with a title,"²⁰ explaining a life-long habit of inscribing titles underneath his works with clarity and precision, making the inscription an integral component of both the visual effect as well as the meaning of his work.²¹ It does not follow,

however, as Richard Hoppe-Sailer has noted, that "unambiguous interpretations" may be culled from Klee's titles, especially when "text and image barely seem to occupy any common ground."²² Titles were often ascribed and changed after the fact if it suited the artist's purpose. And Klee had a singular penchant for combining disparate elements. Blessed with a multiplicity of talents, he played violin at a near-professional level, and seriously contemplated a career in poetry, a path whose exercise, he seriously believed, would not hinder his parallel ambition to become a visual artist.²³ Even as he gradually decided in favor of painting, he allowed interdisciplinary interests to steer his painterly decisions in multifarious ways. He created numerous illustrations of literary texts, e.g., *Voltaire's Candide* (1911–12) (plates 56–57) and Curt Corrinth's *Postdamer Platz*, and, even more importantly for our purposes, inserted literal writing in the very visual fabric of his images, exploring the poetic while simultaneously indulging in the same kind of radical experimentation as other modernists.

But linguistic signs take many forms, and the diversity with which they appear in Klee's work belies strict categorization, a task nonetheless greatly facilitated by the impressive scholarly work of Marianne Vogel and Kathryn Porter Aichele, to whom any serious investigator of Klee's relationship to language owes a substantial debt.²⁴ Among the key issues both address is whether the relationship between word and image in Klee is one of disjunction or reconciliation,²⁵ an especially difficult question to answer because, as Aichele admits, Klee's approach to creativity "precludes the encoding of fixed meaning."²⁶ As a result, Klee's work, like that of many artists, has generated multiple, often contradictory, readings.²⁷ All the same, this diversity should hardly prohibit art historians from identifying distinct tendencies within his production, as variegated as that production may be, and so long as the requisite disclaimer (i.e., that these tendencies cannot be considered exhaustive) accompanies those identifications. At the very least, such exercises allow the richness and complexity of Klee's engagement with the linguistic to emerge in sharper relief, the more so because another of Klee's key ambitions—resurrecting the beginnings of art—intersects his engagement with language in significant ways. To his mind, drawing and writing had a common origin, expressed in the most fundamental visual element: the line. "At the dawn of civilization," he wrote, "when writing and drawing were the same thing, [the line] was the basic element."²⁸ The idea is hardly farfetched; in ancient Greek,

11 See Loude, "Paul Klee," 354.

12 Marcel Franciscano, *Paul Klee: His Work and Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.

13 Hoxthausen, *Paul Klee*, 272.

14 Matthias Bärmann, "As if it concerned myself," Emigration, illness, and the Creative Process in Paul Klee's Lost Years," in *Paul Klee: Tod und Feuer; die Erfüllung im Spätwerk*, ed. Matthias Bärmann, exh. cat. (Riehen/Bosel: Fondation Beyeler; Woburn/Bern: Benteli, 2003), 13.

15 James Smith Pierce, *Paul Klee and Primitive Art* (New York: Gorland, 1976), 88.

16 Greenberg, "Paul Klee," 68.

17 Klee, *Diaries*, #105.

18 *Ibid.*, #63.

19 Ann Temkin, "Paul Klee and the Avant-Garde 1912–1940," in *Paul Klee*, ed. Carolyn Lonchner (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1987), 17.

20 Letter to Lily Stumpf, Nov. 1, 1903 in Klee, *Briefe*, 1:359.

21 In this context, one might also cite the intriguing argument presented by Peter Klaus Schuster, of a relationship between Klee's use of language and emblem books. See "The World as Fragment: Building Blocks of the Klee Universe," in *The Klee Universe*, ed. Dieter Scholz and Christino Thomson, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 14–23. See also Marianne Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild: Das schriftliche Paul Klee und die Rolle der Sprache in seinem Denken und in seiner Kunst* (Munich: Scöner, 1992),

128.

22 Richard Hoppe-Sailer, "Genesis and Gorden: The Case of 'Inferner Park,'" in *Paul Klee's Enchanted Garden*, ed. Michael Baumgartner and Morienne Keller, exh. cat. (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2008), 76.

23 Klee, *Diaries*, #121.

24 See Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, Kathryn Porter Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) and Aichele's *Paul Klee, Poet/Painter* (Rochester, NY: Comden House, 2006).

25 Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing*, 9.

26 *Ibid.*, 10 and Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 120–24.

27 See, for example, Jenny Anger, "How Many Klees Today?," *Canadian Art Review* 18 (1992): 102–111, or Stephen H. Watson, *Crescent Moon over the Rational: Philosophical Interpretations of Paul Klee* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

28 Paul Klee, *Notebooks, Volume 1: The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Rolf Manheim (New York: George Wittenborn, 1961), 103.

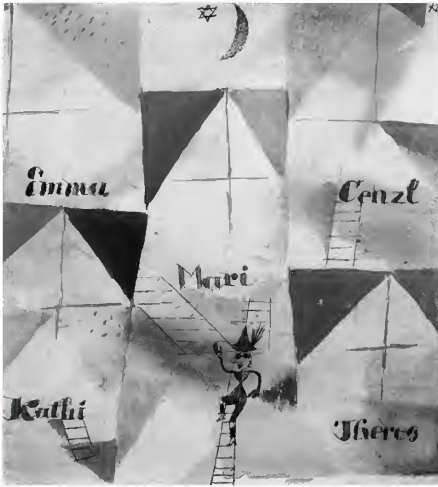


Fig. 2: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *The Bavarian Don Giovanni* (*Der bayrische Don Giovanni*), 1919/116. Watercolor and ink on paper, 22.5 x 21.3 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY, Estate of Karl Nierendorf, 48.1172.69.

Mayan, and Old English, the words for writing and painting are one and the same.

Klee, it seems, was an astute student of the image/language relationship. In addition, and more surprisingly, he deployed formal and thematic strategies that anticipate arguments present-day linguists, neuroscientists, and cognitive psychologists have made about the birth of communication and the way the brain processes writing. Since this aspect of his artistic production has yet to be given attention in the art historical literature, it will occupy a central place in this essay. And though the artist could not have known, let alone digested, recent advances in linguistics, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience, it will be the contention of this study that, from this select, interdisciplinary perspective, Klee's subtle and distinctive engagements with the linguistic reveal a different logic than what emerges from traditional art historical accounts, a logic that may mandate adopting a more elastic definition of what constitutes the linguistic.

KLEE'S USE OF LANGUAGE

At the outset, it is instructive to review some of the visual/conceptual models to which Klee alluded when inserting writing into his images. Intriguingly, even a penchant for complexity did not prevent him, on occasion, from employing language in a purely conventional sense. *The Bavarian Don Giovanni* (*Der bayrische Don Giovanni*) (1919), a not-so-veiled reference to Leporello's famous catalogue aria in Mozart's opera, simply allows the names of the artist's fictive feminine conquests to float willy-nilly before the picture plane (fig. 2). Here, words refer to specific

human individuals, with no complicated puns or semantic allusions to decipher. *To Make Visible* (*sichtbar machen*) (1926; plate 59) is more subtle, although a human figure still shares the visual field with language: in this case, the words "sichtbar machen" ("to make visible"). Disparate though visual and verbal elements may be, they are now connected insofar as a nearly identical figure-eight outlines both the eyes of the figure and the letter s of "sichtbar." "Making visible" thus refers both to the very title of this work, and to the function of art in general—not, as in *The Bavarian Don Giovanni*, to the names of individuals. Allowing shapes to perform double-duty—a proclivity often found in Klee's engagement with the linguistic—is all the more appropriate here because, whenever anything is made visible, it is accessible through the sense of sight, or, to put it differently, through the eye.²⁹ These differences notwithstanding, *The Bavarian Don Giovanni* and *To Make Visible* still share a common element. Since letters, in Klee's own words, eliminate foreshortening and, "force the third dimension into the flat plane,"³⁰ word and image coexist in a "bookish" space, perhaps a catalogue for *The Bavarian Don Giovanni*³¹ or a primer for *To Make Visible*. The writing is not inserted in a conventional, illusionistic or perspectival visual frame but in one already distorted and flattened to accommodate it. In the process, the metaphor of the book—i.e., of a flat but heterogeneous field—displaces the governing metaphor for visual art since the Renaissance: i.e., of a window on the world.

In *High and Shining Stands the Moon* (*Hoch und stralend steht der Mond*) (1916; fig. 3), Klee included a translation of a poem by Wang Seng Yu, and amended some of the words, as if in a new form of illuminated manuscript: "Hoch" appropriately appears to descend the slope of a hill while the o of "Mond" ("Moon," in English) is much brighter than its surrounding letters, making it stand out like an astral body.³² This provides a perfect example of what Marianne Vogel calls Klee's tripartite use of shapes as letters, pictorial elements, and objective forms.³³ In this instance, Klee manufactured visual solutions that correlate to the specific meanings of the words employed, if only in select examples, because words seldom offer the opportunity to have a single letter—in this case, the o of "Mond"—or an abstract form—a circle—resemble the complete outline of the object to which they refer.

In another poem Klee chose to "embellish," *Once Risen from the Gray of Night* (*Einst dem Grau der Nacht enttaucht*) (1918; fig. 4), a text now attributable to the artist himself, color sometimes enhances, sometimes obscures the letters themselves, making the poem difficult to read.³⁴ [This ambiguity perhaps prompted Klee to write out the poem, in legible handwriting, and in its entirety, immediately above the "illuminated" version.] The piece thus juxtaposes two possible ways of manipulating language: one,

29 Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing*, 15.

30 Klee, *Diaries*, #425.

31 Klee apparently kept such a catalogue himself, to remind him of "the great sexual question" (*ibid.*, #83).

32 Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing*, 72.

33 Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 121.

34 See Marc Le Bot, *Paul Klee* (Paris: Maeght, 1992), 88.

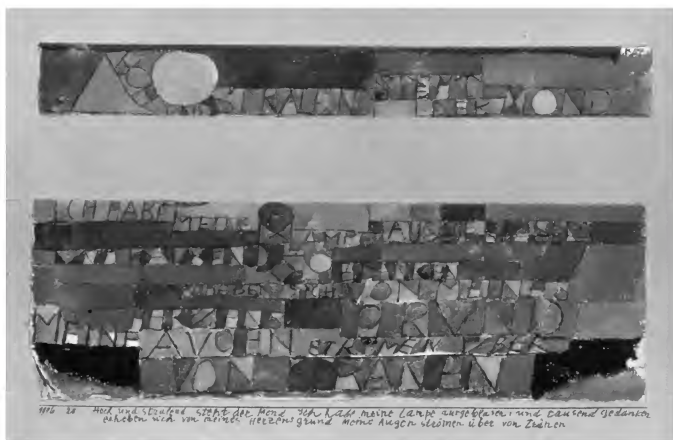


Fig. 3: Paul Klee, *High and Shining Stands the Moon* (*Hoch und stralend steht der Mond*), 1916/20. Watercolor and pen on paper, 14 x 24 cm, private collection.

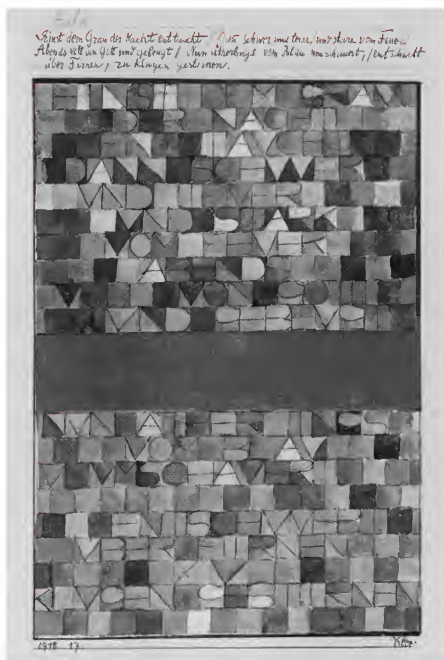


Fig. 4: Paul Klee, *Once Risen from the Gray of Night* (*Einst dem Grau der Nacht enttaucht*), 1918/17. Watercolor, pen, and pencil on paper; cut, recombined, and bordered with ink, 22.6 x 15.8 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

in which letters are clearly outlined; and another, where they function as a scaffolding, to use Jenny Anger's term,³⁵ within which changing colors inject variety in the composition. Though color choice is by no means predictable, Aichele notes that the grays and blues in the upper section reflect the darker imagery of the poem's introduction, while certain individual words, such as "fire," are highlighted with orange and yellow.³⁶ These amendments again demonstrate the variety with which Klee employed language, not just from work to work, but even within the fabric of individual works themselves. It is almost as if, by presenting different possibilities, the artist invites us

to ponder how or whether these differences signify. Do colors communicate effectively on their own, or only as auxiliaries to a text? Does the application of color enhance or distract from the interpretation of meaning? Are colors equal, or are some more communicative than others? Klee may not have come to definitive answers to these questions himself; instead, he conducted experiments through which they might be asked and visualized.

Even so, just as *The Bavarian Don Giovanni* and *To Make Visible Allude to a catalogue or a primer*, respectively, *High and Shining Stands the Moon* and *Once Risen from the Gray of Night* recall typesetting grids, where letters fit in compartments arranged along bands and rows, alternating size and font, but retaining a flat, anti-illusionistic character. (On occasion, Klee borrowed the age-old convention of enlarging or highlighting the initial letter of a text, poem, or inscription.) Speaking of grids, even architecture provided a geometric lattice into which he inserted linguistic elements, as in *City of Cathedrals* (*Stadt der Kathedralen*) (1927; plate 66). Façades, according to Andrew Kagan, are "assembled from sign-units—Xs, Os, dashes, and so forth—[and thus] are closely related to Klee's numerous script pictures."³⁷ They are also related, as André Masson cleverly noticed, to pre-Columbian textiles,³⁸ perhaps Inca quipu knotting believed to comprise an accounting system or rudimentary alphabet (fig. 5). Klee might have been aware of this connection, given that Anni Albers, the wife of Josef and a great admirer of Klee,

35 Jenny Anger, *Paul Klee and the Decorative in Modern Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 86.

36 Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing*, 77; see also, Jürgen Gloesmer, *Paul Klee: The Colored Works* (Bern: Kunstmuseum Bern, 1979), 47.

37 Andrew Kagan, "Paul Klee's 'Polyphonic Architecture,'" *Arts Magazine* 54, no. 8 (Jan. 1980): 156; see also Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 127, and Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing*, 153–55.

38 André Masson, *Eulogy of Paul Klee* (New York: Curt Valentin, 1950), np.

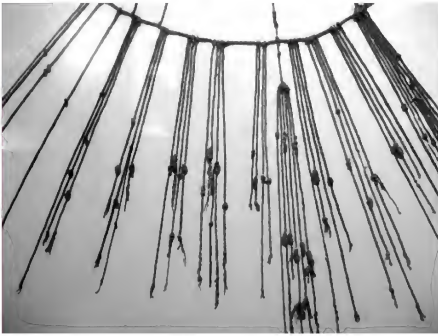


Fig. 5: Inca Quipu, rope, c. 1300–1532, Museo Larco, Lima.

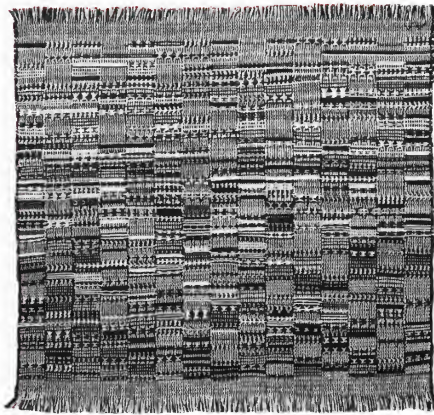


Fig. 6: Anni Albers (1899–1994), *Open Letter*, 1958. Weaving, 58.4 x 59.7 cm, Josef and Anni Albers Foundation, Bethany, CT.

executed numerous woven patterns, one of which was revealingly entitled *Open Letter* (fig. 6). According to Virginia Gardner Troy, *Open Letter* uses thread as text, as “individual pattern units that, when taken or ‘read’ as a whole, implies content and meaning through the arrangement of codified visual information, analogous to the way one reads a paragraph composed of letters, words, and sentences.”³⁹ The same may be said of Klee’s own *Drawing Knotted in the Manner of a Net* (*Zeichnung in der Art eines Netzes geknüpft*) (1920; fig. 7), where the letter B appears six times on the upper left, and six times, though reversed, on the

39 Virginia Gardner Troy, *Anni Albers and Ancient American Textiles: From Bauhaus to Black Mountains* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 156; see also Jenny Anger, “Paul Klee, Anni and Josef Albers, and Robert Rauschenberg: Weaving and the Grid at Black Mountain College,” in *Klee and America*, ed. Josef Helfenstein and Elizabeth Hutton Turner (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2006), 238–53.

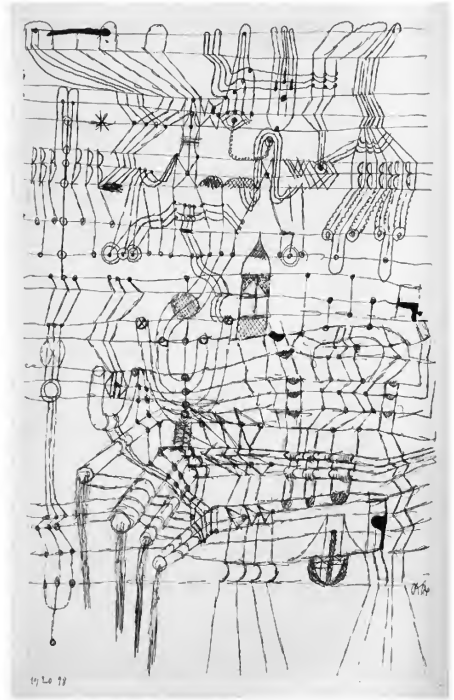


Fig. 7: Paul Klee, *Drawing Knotted in the Manner of a Net* (*Zeichnung in der Art eines Netzes geknüpft*), 1920/98. Pen and black ink on wove paper, 31.1 x 19.1 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, The Berggruen Klee Collection, 1984.315.20.

upper right.⁴⁰ Intriguingly, Mark Roskill described Klee’s architectural designs as if they were tapestries: “The effect is of an ‘architecture’ that devolves, as in a tapestry, from the texturing and the stratification or overlap of intercalated shapes, close up behind the picture plane.”⁴¹ Aichele says something similar of *Let It Glow Outside* (*lass abseits glühn*) (1915), where “letters appear to have as much material substance as architectural structures,” and a “semantic relationship” is established “between the words and the fenestrated building façade.”⁴²

In *Ad Marginem* (1930), Klee opted for still another approach: instead of evoking architecture or textiles, he painted a natural scene, distributing vegetal and animal forms at the margins of the canvas, thereby explaining the use of the term “marginem” in the title (fig. 8). Drawn away from the center, where it conventionally lies, our attention drifts toward multiple visual

40 Sabine Rewald, *Paul Klee: The Berggruen Klee Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 114–15.

41 Mark Roskill, *Klee, Kandinsky, and the Thought of Their Time: A Critical Perspective* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 83.

42 Aichele, *Paul Klee’s Pictorial Writing*, 4.



Fig. 8: Paul Klee, *Ad Marginem*, 1930/210. Watercolor on varnish-primed cardboard nailed to a stretcher, 46 x 36 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel.

focal points at the periphery, undermining the conventions of one-point, perspectival painting. In addition, Klee inserted a number of isolated letters, *r*, *u*, *l*, and *v* in the same visual field, combining the visually iconic and the arbitrarily symbolic, just as maps combine the physical contours of territory and their corresponding verbal labels.⁴³ If Klee were now looking to maps for conceptual models, he would be capitalizing, not simply on their ability to combine word and image, but also on their rotational symmetry: specifically, the way we can instinctively turn maps around to conform to the direction of our itinerary. Along these lines, it is also worth mentioning that placing one cardinal point—e.g., north—at the top of maps is no less arbitrary than language is a system of arbitrary signs, since some cultures place south there instead. By conceptualizing painting as a kind of map, rather than as an image conforming to the consistent and systematic rules of linear perspective, Klee forces us to shift our vantage point, not only from the center to the periphery, but side-wise and even upside down.

Although *Ad Marginem* references no specific geographical landmarks, other paintings do precisely that: e.g., *Landscape near E (in Bavaria)* [*Landschaft bei E. [in Bayern]*] (1921; fig. 9), perhaps an allusion to the village of Ebenhausen near Munich. Here, a letter is firmly embedded in the landscape, no differently than footpaths, rock formations, brickwork, or stylized trees.



Fig. 9: Paul Klee, *Landscape near E (in Bavaria)* (*Landschaft bei E. [in Bayern]*), 1921/182. Oil and pen on paper, cut, recombined and bordered with watercolor and pen, 49.8 x 35.2 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

Perchance, we are provided a walking map or a topographic equivalent of a verbal itinerary,⁴⁴ or meant to ponder the difference between language and its referents. A long-debated idea in the philosophy of language, the latter issue was given literal incarnation in conceptual art, when Joseph Kosuth, for one, juxtaposed real objects with their dictionary definitions. The contrast between text and image in Klee's pieces, though present, is less jarring, primarily because the objects are not literal and the linguistic components incomplete. Yet Klee still invites his audience to speculate about the potential disconnect between verbal and visual information, if only because, as Aichele rightly posits, a foreknowledge of the artist's whereabouts at the time of the painting's execution is necessary to identify the abbreviation. Without that information, our ability to associate the painting with any location, let alone to interpret the meaning of the initial itself, would be severely impeded.

If *Landscape near E (in Bavaria)* employs language referentially, other pieces scatter letters throughout the picture plane, ostensibly for their graphic qualities alone. According to Aichele, this mode exemplifies a shift in interest among modern artists

43 Ibid., 90.

44 Ibid., 98.



Fig. 10: Paul Klee, *Handbill for Comedians (Werbeblatt der Komiker)*, 1938/42. Gouache and newsprint mounted on light cardboard, 48.6 x 32.1 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, The Berggruen Klee Collection, 1984.315.57.

from "letter design to theories about the origin and nature of language."⁴⁵ In this vein, *Handbill for Comedians (Werbeblatt der Komiker)* (1938; fig. 10) recalls ancient writing systems whose meanings are not readily intelligible because they rely (like Egyptian hieroglyphs) partly on arbitrary signs, partly on pictographs.⁴⁶ This combination prompted the philosopher Theodor Adorno to call Klee's work "hieroglyphic," the code for which "has been lost, a loss that plays into its content."⁴⁷ In *Handbill*, Aichele likewise writes, Klee's pictorial language ranges "from denotative pictographs to nonfigurative abstractions."⁴⁸ She also mentions that, by the early twentieth century, a consensus emerged that hieroglyphs combined phonograms (a verbal unit standing for a sound), logograms (a single symbol representing an entire word without designating its pronunciation), and abstract signs. Confined in geometric blocks, hieroglyphs, she continues, "were read from right to left and top to bottom." For Klee, "these characteristic features of hieroglyphic signs and their

45 Ibid., 114.

46 Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 131.

47 Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 124.

48 Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing*, 133.



Fig. 11: Paul Klee, *The Order of High C (Der Orden vom hohen C)*, 1921/100. Watercolor and pencil on paper bordered with watercolor, 32 x 23 cm, location unknown.

structural units provided models for pictorial constructs that conformed to a visual logic other than resemblance to the external world."⁴⁹ Aichele hits the nail on the head. Read laterally rather than in depth, letters rarely permit overlap, foreshortening, or perspective. As Klee crafted "scripts" that could be "read" from left to right or right to left, top to bottom or bottom to top, his audience registers these compositional configurations as flat, and peruses them sequentially, like a writing system, not like the deep, illusionistic space of Western, post-Renaissance art.

The same applies to *The Order of High C (Der Orden vom hohen C)* (1921; fig. 11), although the frame of reference is now the musical score,⁵⁰ another sign system organized laterally rather than illusionistically, with the letter C evoking the open mouth of a singer, again playing double-duty, just as eyes in *To Make Visible* were denoted by a figure-eight. But instead of referencing the sense of sight, Klee draws an analogy between sight and sound, as he did in *Child Consecrated to Suffering (W = geweihtes Kind)* (1935; fig. 12), donning a child's forehead with the letter W, pronounced "Weh" in German, the very word for "suffering." Yet these two uses of letters are radically different: C functions both to denote the opening of the mouth and to con-

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid., 82-85.



Fig. 12: Paul Klee, *Child Consecrated to Suffering (W = geweihtes Kind)*, 1935/31. Oil and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 15.9 x 23.5 cm, Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Buffalo, NY, Room of Contemporary Art Fund, RCA 1940:12.



Fig. 13: Paul Klee, *Villa R*, 1919/153. Oil on cardboard, 26.5 x 22 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel.

note its arbitrary meaning in musical notation; *W* has no comparable analog in human anatomy, unless it is meant to evoke a frown on the child's forehead. Its reference to the sound "Weh" is also more direct, if only because pronouncing the letter *C* does

not necessarily correspond to the pitch of the musical note. The unpredictability with which Klee combined word and image also jibes with his strategy of substituting images for words, such as signing his work with a clover: "der Klee" in German.⁵¹ Sometimes, he used codified signs out of context, or invented new signs; his production is so variegated because he himself loved "to reconcile...opposites! To express the great manifold in a single word!"⁵²

KLEE, READING, AND NEUROSCIENCE

Even on the basis of this cursory, incomplete summary, one can appreciate not only the formal diversity of, but also the numerous conceptual sources for Klee's references to language: books, textiles, maps, typesetting grids, illuminated manuscripts, architectural façades, musical scores, and non-Western hieroglyphs—just to name the most obvious. Facing such pluralism, it stands to reason that art historians, pondering whether the word/image relationships Klee established were disjunctive or conciliatory,⁵³ dismiss the possibility of a single, underlying rationale governing his engagement with the linguistic. As Ann Temkin put it: "Klee's signs are as flexible in meaning as they are in size or shape."⁵⁴ This conclusion is widely endorsed, and remains, in many respects, unassailable. All the same, this essay will advance the proposition that Klee's word/image combinations veer more—though not exclusively—toward disjunction than reconciliation, and that recent findings in neuroscience, especially those pertaining to the biological constraints on reading and writing, introduce new, more discriminatory conceptual tools to support this premise.

From this perspective, Klee not only celebrated a modernist sense of space; he also relied—unwittingly—on crucial skills human beings have acquired through evolution. Since writing is a relatively new invention (the first alphabets are no more than five thousand years old), natural selection had barely enough time to engender a particular proficiency for the tasks of reading and writing. On the other hand, it cannot be gainsaid that human beings possess such a proficiency: namely, to recognize and decipher certain forms, the configurations of which correspond

51 Klee, *Diaries*, #295.

52 *Ibid.*, #389.

53 Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing*, 9.

54 Temkin, "Paul Klee and the Avant-Garde," 31.



Fig. 14: Paul Klee, *Park near Lu[cerne] (Park bei Lu[zern])*, 1938/129. Oil and colored paste on paper and jute fabric, 100 x 70 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

to the letters of the alphabets they learn.⁵⁵ Current neuroscientists resolve this conundrum by positing that human beings and their hominid ancestors inherited and honed an ability to detect topographical landscape features—trees, rivers, rock formations, etc., and the shapes of protective structures or natural shelters—for millions of years.⁵⁶ It can hardly be coincidental, then, that letters such as T, Y, J, or L are stylized versions of such features.⁵⁷ Quickly recognizable and easy to write, they qualify as ideal candidates for inclusion in a writing system. Klee exploited this relationship with a vengeance; as Will Grohmann comments: “one cannot be sure whether the ciphers signify mere landscape elements or figures.”⁵⁸ Marcel Francisocono came to an analogous conclusion, writing that, to his mind, Klee reduces “things themselves—figures, plants, rocks, the very space—to a single kind of being.”⁵⁹ As far as *Villa R* (1919; fig. 13) is concerned, Francisocono claims that the R “is as much an object in the landscape as the villa, the hills, or the heavenly signs.”⁶⁰

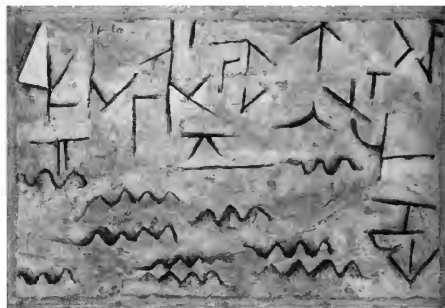


Fig. 15: Paul Klee, *The Rhine at Duisburg (der Rhein bei Duisburg)*, 1937/145. Gypsum, oil, and charcoal on cardboard, 18.4 x 27.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, The Berggruen Klee Collection, 1984.315.56.

In combining, even confusing, landscape and linguistic elements, Klee revisited a critical aspect of the birth of writing: specifically, that we re-channeled an ancient, acute sensitivity to the visual character of our physical environment for the novel purpose of inventing graphic forms of communication.⁶¹ These relationships were not simply noticed by neuroscientists. Historians of language have also posited that the letter Y looks like a stylized tree—a relationship to which Klee often hints, as in *Park near Lu[cerne] (Park bei Lu[zern])* (1938; fig. 14)—and have even identified an ox’s head on its side as the source of the Greek letter alpha, α , the origin of our letter A (if placed upside down, even our letter A still reveals this figural pedigree). As is well known, Klee owned a copy of Karl Weule’s study of early scripts, *Vom Kerbstock zum Alphabet: Urformen der Schrift (From Incised Stick to Alphabet: The Original Forms of Writing)* that appeared in 1915. James Smith Pierce has already noted that diagrams in the book juxtaposed identifiable, representational shapes and the Chinese characters from which they were extrapolated.⁶² The same may be said of many letters in our own alphabet. M for example, was derived from a stylized representation of water or waves,⁶³ a point with which Klee was either familiar or intuited, as may be seen in *The Rhine at Duisburg (der Rhein bei Duisburg)* (1937; fig. 15), or even in *The Scales of Twilight (Die Waage der Dämmerung)* (1921; plate 5), where mountain peaks and depressions are designated by means of a hybrid form, something between an M and a W.

But just as Klee gives with one hand, he takes away with the other. He may have recognized that human beings cleverly appropriated landscape features to invent written language, yet, in view of his proclivity for disjunction, he often frustrates our other proclivity: namely, to discern meaning. Explaining how, though, requires a closer assessment of the reading process, and differen-

55 See Stanislas Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain: The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention* (New York: Viking Press, 2009), 4.

56 *Ibid.*, 137ff.

57 *Ibid.*, 121ff.

58 See Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, 335.

59 Francisocono, *Paul Klee*, 180.

60 *Ibid.*, 184.

61 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 144ff.

62 James Smith Pierce, “Pictographs, Ideograms, and Alphabets in the Work of Paul Klee,” *Journal of Typographic Research* 1 (July 1967): 220.

63 *Ibid.*, 236.

tiating that process from other ways of deciphering meaning. Reading, after all, mandates coordinating a specific number of complex tasks: distinguishing large numbers of characters from one another, upper- from lower-case letters, variations in fonts, and, when scripts are not printed, widely different and idiosyncratic forms of handwriting. In each case, reading is contingent upon identifying what is *invariant*—i.e., what remains the same—among the variety of ways the same words may be represented.⁶⁴ If a specific word is unreadable, we will

make educated guesses depending on the context, and against our own set of expectations about what its meaning might be.⁶⁵ This inclination even allows us to read misspelled words accurately, and, occasionally, even to overlook the misspelling.⁶⁶ Outside conscious awareness, then, our brain continuously entertains and tests multiple alternatives, discarding some, accepting others, until a reasonable interpretation emerges. The ability to perceive invariance, incidentally, is another trait we have inherited through evolution: an animal unable to detect the same predator or prey under different conditions or from different vantage points will have little chance of survival. Accordingly, we are especially sensitive to letters such as T, Y, or L precisely because they correspond to salient aspects of the physical environment—in other words, aspects that tend to display greater *invariance* (allegedly, even macaque monkeys have neurons that fire when looking at similar shapes).⁶⁷

Letters such as T, Y, or L also resemble junctions: environmental features where different physical planes meet, thus signaling important landmarks to remember or obstacles to negotiate.⁶⁸ Apparently, Klee grasped spatial relationships in similar terms; in his *Notebooks*, he illustrated analyses of visual tensions in the up-down, left-right directions by approximating letters such as H, T, or L (fig. 16).⁶⁹ In his *Diaries*, he likewise remarked that lines function “as frontiers between areas of different tonalities or colors.”⁷⁰ It therefore stands to reason that, as our ancestors invented writing systems, they appropriated shapes to which they had grown especially sensitive through evolution. Piggybacking on our inherent sensitivity to detect topographical junctions in the environment, they adapted crucial survival skills when inventing a new,

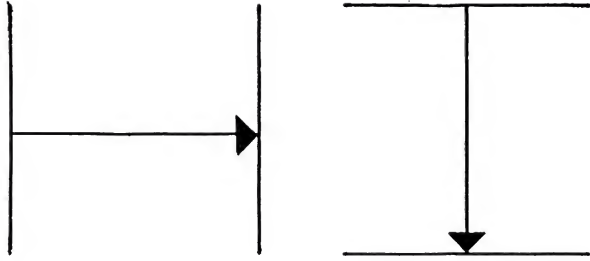


Fig. 16: Paul Klee, *Dynamic Density*, in *Notebooks, Volume 1: The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: George Wittenborn, 1961), 29.

graphic means of communication. And though the configurations they devised were ones to which human beings were already predisposed to respond, those predispositions were sharply reinforced during exposure to the specific alphabets codified in their native cultures.

So much so, that, just as our sensitivity to some configurations intensifies, our sensitivity to others atrophies. Under cultural conditioning, we grow highly adept at detecting the minor differences between letters in our own writing system, to the detriment of our ability to detect those in others.⁷¹ Even if letters were originally extrapolated from topographical landmarks, we register the configurations of our own alphabets in such a localized part of the brain that they are understood as qualitatively different from the very natural forms from which they were originally adapted. Letters, in effect, form a world unto themselves and are processed in a different part of the brain than numbers, though their configurations may be remarkably similar (and even interchangeable across different languages).⁷² With all due respect to Franciscono, then, letters and landscape structures are not “a single kind of being.”⁷³ As far as *Villa R* (fig. 13) is concerned, Rainer Crone, attuned to Klee’s penchant for disjunction, seems to be on the right track when he states that the R “steps uneasily into the landscape...the R is of a different order, a different dimension, than the rest of the scene.”⁷⁴ When learning another language, especially one whose alphabet does not correspond to our own, we notice these different “orders” or “dimensions” straightaway: in effect, we strain to learn and remember new configurations whose meanings at first escape us, reliving, as it were, the time when we first learned to read, and re-experience

64 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 18.

65 *Ibid.*, 23.

66 *Ibid.*, 47.

67 *Ibid.*, 121.

68 *Ibid.*, 137ff.

69 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 29.

70 Klee, *Diaries*, #842.

71 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 21ff.

72 *Ibid.*, 56.

73 Franciscono, *Paul Klee*, 180.

74 Rainer Crone, “Cosmic Fragments of Meaning: On the Syllables of Paul Klee,” in *Paul Klee: Legends of the Sign*, ed. Rainer Crone and Joseph Leo Koerner (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 32. Marianne Vogel seems to concur in *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 132, and Aichele in *Paul Klee’s Pictorial Writing*, 62.

the struggle to differentiate a set of unfamiliar symbols and its corresponding sounds.

As is well known, Klee was fascinated with the state of childhood. "I begin to execute forms," he confessed, "as if I knew nothing about painting...like a self-taught man, without looking left or right."⁷⁵ He even described himself as a "childish man."⁷⁶ To be sure, claims of this kind—throwing conventions to the wind and seeing the world with complete naïveté, like a child—were voiced by so many modern artists as to take on the status of pedestrian clichés. But in Klee's case, these statements indicate more than mere rhetorical posturing or grandstanding. One could make the argument that the artist frustrates our natural desire to discern meaning, not so much by reverting to childhood as by forcing us to revisit the state when reading was not the effortless activity we take for granted as mature adults, but the slow and arduous task it is for pre-literate children. Our inability to "read" *Handbill for Comedians* (fig. 10) can be attributed, arguably, not just to our having no frame of reference to decode the "hieroglyphs," but also to our inability to contextualize the marks. Some are figural elements; others are letters; others still appear completely abstract. As such, they do not form a consistent, interpretable system. If a surrounding context permits us to decipher misspelled words, or those scribbled in particularly bad handwriting, Klee's piece offers so little contextual assistance that one begins to suspect that it was specifically concocted to frustrate, not facilitate, interpretation.

This frustration also dispels the mistaken notion that, because of their pictographic quality, hieroglyphs evince greater transparency than arbitrary signs. On the contrary, hieroglyphs required considerable time and effort to decipher, especially those that designate, not an object or animal, but an idea. In fact, it is precisely because of their semantic inconsistency and relative opacity that hieroglyphs have progressively disappeared from most writing systems (even the Egyptians developed simpler forms of graphic communication for everyday use). In a code where a different sign represents a different object or idea, the reader—since objects or ideas are potentially limitless—must commit hundreds of signs to memory, making writing and reading accessible only to those who can devote inordinate amounts of time to study. Not surprisingly, the majority of individuals living in cultures employing hieroglyphic or pictographic scripts are illiterate. On the other hand, if a limited number of letters were devised—say, some thirty or so—whose combination represent the majority (or even all) of the sounds emitted in the spoken language, then the system is self-contained, easy to learn, and infinitely expandable. While inventing his fictive signs, however—we dare not use the term "system"—Klee deliberately resisted this tendency. His signs are unreadable, but, as Joseph Leo Koerner puts it, still "recognizable as writing. They cannot be mistaken for 'mere' decoration."⁷⁷ Koerner's observation is sound, but so is Marianne Vogel's warning—that an O, an X, or a V comprise



Fig. 17: Paul Klee, *Ad Marginem* (upside down), 1930/210. Watercolor on varnish-primed cardboard nailed to a stretcher, 46 x 36 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel.

such simple, rudimentary forms that it is impossible to determine whether they are indeed letters, pictorial elements, or both.⁷⁸ To make matters worse, Klee combined such ambiguous shapes with pictographic forms, thus *deliberately reversing* the historical evolution of writing from hieroglyphs to alphabets. Resurrecting its antecedent, pictographic origins, the artist hints at some secret message to be decoded, yet, seeking to imbue his art with a sense of mystery, withholds that meaning from the beholder. In effect, Klee injected his own archaeologically informed insights into his art to evoke the beginnings of things—specifically, critical aspects of the earliest codified writing systems—but in ways that were deliberately nebulous (one thinks of Jean Laude's term "fictive archaeology"⁷⁹ or Claude Frontisi's "pseudo-écriture"⁸⁰).

If we revisit *Ad Marginem* (fig. 8) with these ideas in mind, we readily concede that the individual letters, *r*, *u*, *v*, *l*, are clearly legible. But given that, contrary to everyday experience, plants are sprouting from all four edges of the work, and that, in full defiance of gravity, a bird walks upside down at the upper border of the painting, it may be reasonable to speculate that Klee invites his audience to peruse the work from all four possible ori-

75 Klee, *Diaries*, #425, #429.

76 *Ibid.*, #431. For the contemporary interest in the child, see also Franciscano, *Paul Klee*, 92ff.

77 Koerner, "Paul Klee and the Image of the Book," in *Legends of the Sign*, 66.

78 Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 121.

79 Laude, "Paul Klee," 384.

80 Claude Frontisi, "Klee pictographe," in *Les Pictographes: L'Esthétique de l'icône au XXème siècle*, Didier Othinger et al. (Les Sables d'Olonne: Musée de l'Abbaye Sainte-Croix, 1992), 64.

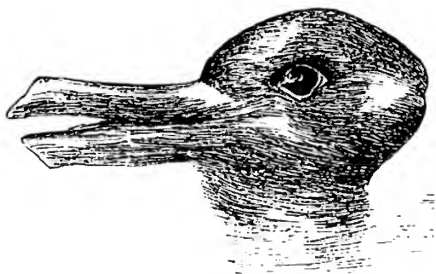


Fig. 18: Joseph Jastrow (1863–1944), *Do You See a Duck or a Rabbit, or Either?*, in “The Mind’s Eye,” *Popular Science Monthly* 54 (1899): 312.



Fig. 19: Paul Klee, *WI (In Memoriam)*, 1938/135. Watercolor, gouache and plaster on burlap, 52 x 45.5 cm, sold at Christie’s Nov. 6, 2008.

entations.⁸¹ (In his *Notebooks*, he even mentions the possibility of uniting multiple perspectives “into a single median collective viewpoint.”⁸²) Notice that, in *Ad Marginem*, plants and animals are still easily readable even if located upside down—the celestial sphere requires no commentary, of course, because it is perfectly symmetrical—but letters are completely unreadable at this orien-

tation (fig. 17), foregrounding the arbitrariness of their design all the more.⁸³ It also means that, when orientation is altered, our detection of invariance is considerably weaker when it comes to letters than to other features of the environment, probably because reading was invented so late in our evolutionary history.⁸⁴ Though we recognize natural forms with no difficulty when reversed, we need to tilt our necks to read the spines of books, and, experience great difficulty deciphering texts printed upside down. Again, we would be in a position not dissimilar to that of children learning letters for the first time, a position in which Klee cleverly connives to place us. This interpretation might also jibe with an argument posited by Andrew Kagan: that Klee’s work and philosophy were informed by the eighteenth-century musical theorist Johann Josef Fux’s treatise, *Gradus ad Parnassum*, from which one of Klee’s own pieces, *Ad Parnassum*, was partially inspired. Although this is not the place to review Kagan’s contribution, suffice to say that Fux’s ambition was to lay out, for music theory and composition, a “method similar to that by which children learn first letters, then syllables, and finally how to read and write.”⁸⁵

But as fascinated as Klee was with the learning process, he ostensibly relished its enhancement less than its undoing. It was stated earlier that, as we learn to read, we become highly sensitized to the minute distinctions among letters in our alphabet. Just as importantly, we are equally sensitized to recognize faces, though both letters and faces are processed in different parts of the brain.⁸⁶ For all intents and purposes, faces are one thing, letters another. (In a way this mutual-exclusivity recalls our ability to see rabbits and ducks [fig. 18], or faces and vases, in the same image, but not both simultaneously.) Klee, of course, had no access to MRI machines, nor could he observe how the brain absorbs different forms of information in real time. Even so, with no cognizance of the latest findings in neuroscience, Klee, ever the rabble-rouser, sought to confuse those very circuits by constructing faces out of letters (fig. 19). To be sure, combining a variety of disparate elements to form human figures is a common practice in his overall production—as in *To Make Visible* (plate 59) and *The Order of High C* (fig. 11); but examples such as *Death and Fire (Tod und Feuer)* (1940; fig. 20) are especially emblematic of the artist’s tendency to induce ambiguity by conflating facial features with linguistic elements. In the main figure, the two eyes, nose, and mouth of the face are composed by the letters T, O, D—the word “Tod,” German for death. Thus, even as faces and letters are processed in different parts of the brain, and register as fundamentally different entities, Klee collapses both, running afoul of our expectations and, as if by design, under-

81 For another example, see *Landscape with Yellow Birds (Landschaft mit gelben Vögeln)* [1923], which James Smith Pierce connects to sources in folk art [Pierce, *Klee and Primitive Art*, 14] as well as Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 40. As early as 1908, moreover, Klee admitted to turning works upside down to “stress lines as feeling directs” (Felix Klee, ed., *Paul Klee: His Life and Work in Documents* [New York: George Braziller, 1962], 14).

82 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 159.

83 Michel Butor, “Conference on Word and Image” (Berlin, 1989) discussed in Jeremy Adler, “Paul Klee as ‘Poet-Painter,’” in *Art, Word and Image*, ed. John Dixon Hunt, David Lomas, and Michael Corris (London: Reaktion Books, 2010), 178–79.

84 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 18–21.

85 Johann Josef Fux, *Steps to Parnassus: The Study of Counterpoint*, trans. Alfred Mann (New York: Norton, 1943), 17; see Andrew Kagan, “Paul Klee’s ‘Ad Parnassum’: The Theory and Practice of Eighteenth-Century Polyphony as Models for Klee’s Art,” *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 1 (Sept. 1977): 92.

86 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 76–78.

mines our ability to read and decipher. Perhaps he even found such a disconcerting combination specifically appropriate for a suggestion of mortality, though this question must remain an open one.

Klee even reveled in disjunction while orchestrating disparate signs to converge into a consistent meaning. In *Child Consecrated to Suffering* (fig. 12), we had already mentioned that Klee devised a scenario where meaning and sound reinforce each other (since the letter *W* is pronounced “Weh” in German, the same sound as the word for “suffering”). But neuroscientists have discovered that the reception of meaning (the lexical route) and the reception of sound (the phonic route) are actually quite dissimilar, again taking different paths toward different areas in the brain. Proficient readers do not fully pronounce words to understand them—that is inefficient and time consuming; instead, they take the lexical route and recall meanings instantly. Only when a word is especially long, complex, and unfamiliar do they decelerate their reading and take the phonic route by enunciating every syllable, almost the way a child reads.⁸⁷ The lexical route not only proves more efficient; it also confers a number of advantages. In English, for example, the letter *B* is pronounced the same way as the verb “to be” and the insect “bee.” These words have the same sound, though completely different meanings—an ambiguity that is effortlessly registered by adults, but that children master only with time. That spelling is so irregular seems illogical, even downright frustrating, especially when sound translates so inconsistently in writing. Yet these incongruities serve a valuable purpose: helping us to identify meanings with greater rapidity. If the letter *B*, the verb “to be,” and the insect “bee,” were all spelled the same way (i.e., as they are pronounced), greater contextual information would be required to understand which sense was intended each time we encountered these words. We may commit more spelling mistakes employing a linguistic system with numerous homonyms, but at least meanings are accessible with greater dispatch.⁸⁸

But even though spelling is considerably more transparent in German than in English, were it not for the title, we would experience difficulty interpreting the *W* in *Child Consecrated to Suffering*. Klee obviously did not mean the mark on the child’s forehead to be read with greater dispatch. To register its meaning, we need to revert to that more primitive way of reading: namely, by thinking of the pronunciation of the letter (the phonic route) rather than simply recording its meaning (the lexical one). It remains unclear, moreover, whether the *W* should be read only as the word “Weh,” or also as a frown on the child’s face, an abstract form, or all of the above. Alternatively, the image might function as a rebus: as when “☹♥U” means: “I love you,” but no other part of the piece conforms to this reading. As it is, only the letter *W* is meant to be pronounced phonetically. Klee, then, was absolutely correct to insist that all visual art begins with a title because, in its absence, the intended meaning of the *W* would most likely have escaped his audience. In which case, the image provides another example



Fig. 20: Paul Klee, *Death and Fire (Tod und Feuer)*, 1940/332. Oil and colored paste on burlap, 46.7 x 44.6 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

of Klee’s combining two radically different routes to meaning (lexical and phonic⁸⁹) just as he required us, in *Death and Fire*, to engage two different brain mechanisms (reading language and recognizing faces) to interpret the same form.

Accordingly, Klee’s employment of letters that evoke sounds should be clearly differentiated from his invented pictographs that do not. In spite of its ambiguity and simplicity, the *W* in *Child Consecrated to Suffering* qualifies as an example of “full” or “complete” writing: i.e., writing that 1) has a communicative purpose, 2) consists of graphic marks on a durable surface, and 3) relates conventional marks to articulate speech.⁹⁰ Most early versions of writing, as well as the majority of Klee’s pseudo-alphabetic marks, might fulfill at least one of these criteria, but rarely all three—and would therefore qualify only as “incomplete writing.” Although most art consists of graphic marks on a lasting surface created for the purpose of communication, it is undeniable that, in *Child Consecrated to Suffering*, the letter *W* relates to conventional speech. This condition obviously applies to *High and Shining Stands the Moon and Once Risen from the Gray of Night* (figs. 3 and 4), since these pieces are “illuminations” of poems written out by the artist in full, but it might also apply to *Death and Fire* (fig. 20) and to *Serpent’s Prey (Schlangenbeute)* (1926; plate 35). In the latter, the letter *S* not only imitates the snake’s sinuous form, as well as the first letter of the animal’s name, but its pronunciation also recalls its hissing sound. Note that, unlike the *W* in *Child Consecrated to Suffering*, the phonic connection works in numerous languages: e.g., “Schlange” in

⁸⁷ Ibid., 27.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 29ff.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 115.

⁹⁰ Steven Roger Fisher, *A History of Writing* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005), 12.



Fig. 21: Paul Klee, *Flowers in Stone* (*Blumen in Stein*), 1939/638. Oil on cardboard, 50 x 39.8 cm, Stiftung Sammlung Bernhard Sprengel, Hanover.



Fig. 22: Paul Klee, *Untitled (Still Life)* [*Ohne Titel [Stillleben]*], 1940. Oil on canvas, 100 x 80.5 cm, private collection.



Fig. 23: Phaistos Disk, Minoan Bronze Age (c. 1600 BCE). Fired clay, 15 (diam.) cm, Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Crete.

German, “serpent” in French, “snake” in English, or “serpiente” in Spanish. *Serpent’s Prey* might thus represent one of those few instances where letter, sound, meaning, and literal shape all manage to converge—few, because the word for snake, of course, does not even begin with an S in all languages using Latin script. Incidentally, the Egyptian hieroglyph for snake became transformed through the Proto-Sinaitic, Phoenician, early Greek, Greek, and Latin alphabets into our letter N, not S.⁹¹

KLEE AND THE HISTORY OF WRITING

Though unacquainted with present-day neuroscience, Klee was familiar with the history of writing. And, one presumes, with the multi-directionality of some early scripts, where one line could read from left to right, the second from right to left, and so on. This condition clearly pertains to “hieroglyphic” pieces such as *Handbill for Comedians* (fig. 10), since, unlike examples of Latin script, the direction in which the work should be “read” remains unclear. James Smith Pierce argued, moreover, that Klee appropriated the employment of the spiral form in pieces such as, say, *Flowers in Stone* (*Blumen in Stein*) (1939; fig. 21) or the bottom right corner of *Untitled (Still Life)* [*Ohne Titel [Stillleben]*] (1940; fig. 22) from the “folk practice of inlaying table-tops with contrasting woods or marbles of various colors representing knives, forks, spoons.”⁹² But Klee may also have known the configuration of early alphabets found on, say, the Cretan Phaistos Disk of c. 1600 BCE (fig. 23). In his *Notebooks*, he studied the development of movement in multiple directions, and subjected writing, not just to spiral, but also to mirror reversal,⁹³ as we have already seen in *Drawing Knotted in the Manner of a Net* (fig. 7). This

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁹² Pierce, *Klee and Primitive Art*, 20.

⁹³ Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 427; *Briefe*, 2:1105.



Fig. 24: Paul Klee, *Pastorale (Rhythms)* (*Pastorale [Rhythmen]*), 1927/20. Tempera on canvas mounted on wood, 69.3 x 52.4 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, NY, Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund and exchange, 157.1945.

way, he not simply undermined the Western tradition of one-point perspective, and indulged in his love of opposing movement and counter-movement;⁹⁴ he also turned back the historical clock by resurrecting a freer, less restrictive aspect of setting (and reading) information. As languages became more standardized, such inconsistencies were gradually corrected, though Klee probably disapproved of these “corrections,” judging them to have robbed language of the creative force it shared with visual art, perhaps prompting him to adapt less restrictive configurations in *Flowers in Stone* or *Untitled (Still Life)*. Given the diversity of his production, however, he still condescended to implement some of these corrective devices in *Pastorale (Rhythms)* (*Pastorale [Rhythmen]*) of 1927 (fig. 24), inserting bands in between the rows of script, much like a musical score.⁹⁵ All the same, though the lines are clearly distinguished from one another, their directionality still remains unclear, to say nothing of their meaning.

Though obviously not a professional linguist, Klee must have understood the ambi-directionality of some early scripts. In 1938, he executed a painting combining arbitrary signs with hieroglyphs, bedecked with arrows pointing both left and right, which he appropriately called *nach rechts, nach links* (*To the Right, To the Left*). He also recommended that his students keep both

⁹⁴ Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 142–43.
⁹⁵ Laude, “Paul Klee,” 368–69.

Alfvão	XX	Y	Δ	↑	↑	WZ	V	W	Δ	J	I	H	N	N	X
Ägyptisch	X	Y	Δ	↑	↑	E	V	W	Δ			H	A		
Allgriechisch	X	Y	Δ			E	N	M			I	H			
Hebräisch	X	Y	Δ	↑	↑	E	H	M			I	H			
Allphönikisch			Δ	↓	↓		Λ	W		Δ	Γ	H		Λ	
Punisch	X			↓	↓		Λ				I	H			
Runen	X	Y	Δ	↑	↑	E	A	M			C	I	N		
Alfvão	Λ	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡
Ägyptisch		‡		E	F	‡	‡							V	
Allgriechisch	H			F			C				K	Y	Λ	L	
Hebräisch	Λ	‡	‡	‡	‡					‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	
Allphönikisch			‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	
Punisch	Λ			‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	‡	
Runen	Λ			F							K	Y	Λ		

Fig. 25: Karl Weule (1864–1926), *Comparative Compilation of Characters, in Vom Kerbstock zum Alphabet* (Stuttgart: Kosmos, 1915), 40.

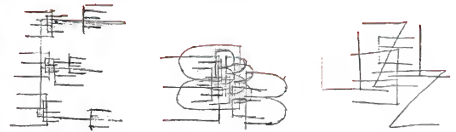


Fig. 26: Paul Klee, *Exercise in Capital Letters* (Jan. 9, 1922), in *The Thinking Eye*, 215.

hands in practice, “for the left works differently from the right. It is not so deft, and for that reason sometimes of more use to you. The right hand writes more naturally, the left more hieroglyphically. Good handwriting, however, is not mere accuracy, but expression (keep the Chinese in mind) and with exercise it will grow more sensitive, more spiritual.”⁹⁶ In fact, Klee himself wrote with his right hand but painted with his left,⁹⁷ and, according to his son, Felix, “could do mirror-writing nimbly and correctly with his left hand.”⁹⁸ He sometimes reversed words in his works—such as “WIR” into “RIW” in *The Angel and the Distribution of Presents* (*der Engel und die Bescherung*)⁹⁹—and was also very attentive to the way Felix learned language: the sounds he emitted, the mishaps he made as he mimicked his parents’ words, and even more importantly for our purposes, the syllables he inverted.¹⁰⁰

Along these lines, it is intriguing that, at a specific moment in time, some writing systems—such as the Brahmi, Greek, and Latin—completely changed the orientation of select letters. Used no differently than before, they were simply reversed as though reflected in a mirror.¹⁰¹ Weule’s *Vom Kerbstock zum Alphabet* included a diagram clearly showing some of these reversals (fig. 25). James Smith Pierce even illustrated this very diagram and Klee’s Bauhaus studies (fig. 26) in the same article, but without

⁹⁶ See Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, 374–75.

⁹⁷ Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 427.

⁹⁸ Klee, *His Life and Work*, 50.

⁹⁹ Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 131.

¹⁰⁰ Klee, *Diaries*, #858.

¹⁰¹ See Fisher, *A History of Writing*, 126, 137.

drawing a direct connection between them.¹⁰² The reason for these alphabetic changes is unclear; perhaps some scribes found some letters still recognizable—i.e., detectable as invariant—yet easier to write in reverse. As other scribes concurred, the innovation spread like an epidemic throughout their respective cultures. Regardless, Klee's cognizance of these reversals should expand the range of his configurations that can legitimately be called "letters," or at least answer Marianne Vogel's question as to whether a reversed B or mirror-reflected J should be considered a letter or an abstract form.¹⁰³

It goes without saying, moreover, that, in order to be adopted within any writing system, alphabetic characters must respect limitations governing human physical dexterity and be relatively easy to outline. Any character too time-consuming to set down becomes a good candidate for simplification or elimination. Not surprisingly, historians of writing have remarked that, despite their superficial differences, most alphabetic systems throughout the world betray noticeable similarities: the majority of characters are compact and can be outlined in a few strokes.¹⁰⁴ And they must also be neither too large nor too small to overtax the scanning capacity of our retina.¹⁰⁵ Joseph Leo Koerner was cited above as saying that, though many of Klee's signs are unreadable, they are "recognizable as writing. They cannot be mistaken for 'mere' decoration."¹⁰⁶ Aichele also argued that Klee exploited "the potential inherent" in graphic forms of representation "that resembled writing but could not be read."¹⁰⁷ These statements are persuasive, but it is also worth asking: how exactly do we recognize Klee's markings as writing, especially if they are unreadable?¹⁰⁸ Why do they not simply strike us as abstract marks? As Jean Laude put it, writing invites reading, but, here, there is nothing to read, if, by reading, of course, we mean scanning arbitrary marks that convey codified meanings.¹⁰⁹ Might not the very definition of writing mandate that it be readable? On this account, even the term "sign," if used in the Saussurian sense, i.e., comprising both a signifier and a signified, both of which are arbitrary and conventional, proves altogether inappropriate in Klee's case.¹¹⁰ To qualify as signs, the marks would need to be decodable—at least to someone.

On this very point, Jean Laude interjected that, though it may not hold true in every case, Klee's markings betray little if any repetition, which would be expected of any working alphabetic code.¹¹¹ One would have to concede, therefore, that many of Klee's inscriptions, at least those that are undecipherable, qualify neither as language nor as signs in the strict sense of the term. Even so, Koerner and Aichele are still on to something: even if they are not, the markings have the "look" or "feel" of writing.

Why? Arguably, because Klee cleverly made them conform to both the visual and manual constraints under which most forms of writing operate: their configuration is compact enough to be easily written, their size is neither too small nor too large to tax the retina's scanning ability, and regular intervals are inserted in between them to exclude overlap, permitting the reader to differentiate element from element.¹¹²

Yet, if some provide only the "look" or "feel" of writing, is Smith Pierce justified in calling Klee's hieroglyphic markings "forgeries" and "caprices,"¹¹³ or Laude a "lure," a "form of deception"?¹¹⁴ Though severe, these terms, given the artist's love of irony and ambiguity, are apposite. Klee's hybrid combinations, after all, seem to be specifically concocted to generate mixed signals, induce uncertainty, and frustrate our low tolerance for meaninglessness. But, from the other side, might not this frustration also play a constructive role in, and contribute to, the overall meaning of Klee's work? Earlier, Adorno was cited as having labeled Klee's markings "hieroglyphic," the code for which "has been lost, a loss that plays into its content."¹¹⁵ On this account, perhaps Klee's failure to signify actually signifies, its very meaninglessness proves meaningful. To this author's mind, this line of investigation seems highly promising, though Adorno unfortunately refrained from exploring his own insight, and did not explain how the loss of meaning creates meaning in the works of Klee.

May we turn to neuroscience for assistance? Curiously, though reading and writing are synonymous with the transfer of information, these now ordinary and commonplace activities are, for all that, not fully comprehended by science. How the human brain registers small markings as syllables, words, and sentences, capable of inciting, say, all the meanings and emotions we experience while reading literature, is still a source of wonder even (nay, especially) to neuroscientists. Paradoxically, insofar as brain functioning is concerned, scientific knowledge frequently advances when something goes awry. If a patient loses an ability or skill after a stroke or accident, localizing any anatomical damage identifies which part of the brain governs that ability or skill. Predictably, when specific areas are injured, patients—again, regardless of culture, linguistic ability, or the writing system learned—lose the ability to recognize and differentiate the letters of their own alphabets, robbing them of their ability to read.¹¹⁶ Might a similar motivation, on a cognitive rather than anatomical level, underlie Klee's ostensible deployment of illegibility? Many of the characteristics he exploited in his pictorial use of language—the reliance on pictographs and hieroglyphs, the approximation of letters and topographical features, the ambi-directionality of script—were gradually eliminated from writing systems, primarily to dispel ambiguity and inject greater clarity in the communicative process. By reintroducing these characteristics, Klee was suggesting the beginnings of things. (As Martin Heidegger declared: "The beginning is the strangest and

102 Pierce, "Pictographs, Ideograms, and Alphabets," 222, 226.

103 Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 122.

104 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 177.

105 *Ibid.*, 13–18.

106 Koerner, "Paul Klee and the Image of the Book," in *Legends of the Sign*, 66.

107 Aichele, *Paul Klee's Pictorial Writing*, 196.

108 See Temkin, "Paul Klee and the Avant-Garde," 28.

109 Laude, "Paul Klee," 382.

110 See also Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 125.

111 Laude, "Paul Klee," 388.

112 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 174ff.

113 Pierce, "Pictographs, Ideograms, and Alphabets," 223.

114 Laude, "Paul Klee," 389.

115 Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 124.

116 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 54ff.

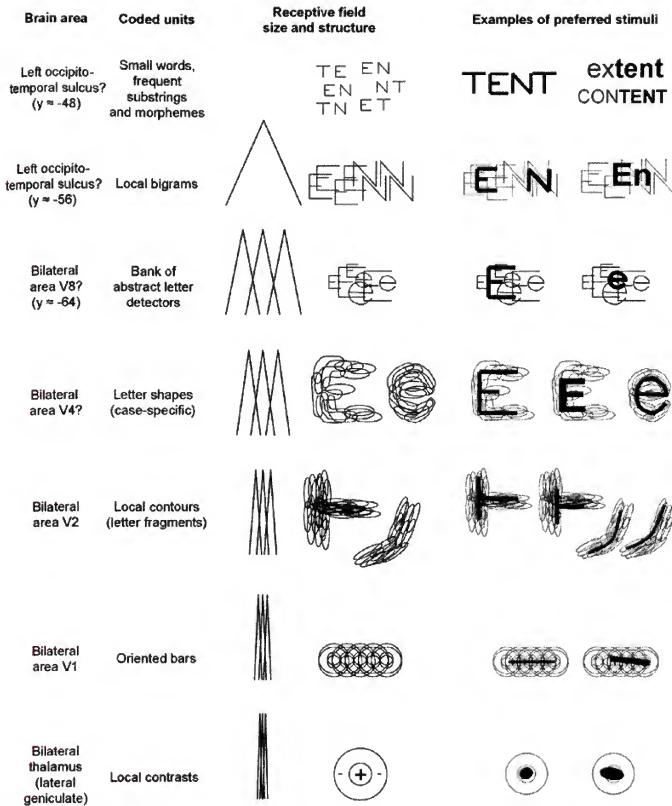


Fig. 27: Stanislas Dehaene (b. 1965), *Hypothetical Model for the Neuronal Hierarchy Supporting Visual Word Recognition*, in *Reading in the Brain: The Science and Evolution of a Human Invention* (New York: Viking, 2009), 151.

mightiest. What comes afterward is...[an] inability to retain the beginning.¹¹⁷ But was he also attempting to understand how language works by depriving it of its strange, mighty power to communicate?

The mirror reversal of the Brahmi, Greek, and Latin scripts, for example, echoed in several of the Bauhaus exercises, cannot be ascribed exclusively to the greater ease with which characters might be jotted down in reverse. There must be something about mirror symmetry that proves salient to our condition as embodied beings—even before culture makes its indelible mark upon us. In the wild, for instance, an ability to identify predator or prey regardless of vantage point is a distinctive advantage. In fact, whenever the brain encodes information about an object,

it also encodes information about its mirror image,¹¹⁸ ensuring that we recognize it from other angles, and understand that a different contour does not denote a different object.¹¹⁹ But what is advantageous in one context may be detrimental in another. The very sensitivity to invariance that ensures survival in our physical environment actually impedes our ability to read. Small children frequently confuse the letter *b* with the letter *d*, and often spontaneously write in reverse. Of course, no human body is perfectly symmetrical, and most individuals are right-handed, implying that one side is invariably privileged in our left/right orientation. Even so, similar mistakes have been observed the world over, irrespective of culture or alphabetic system used.¹²⁰ Fascinated by his own son's process of learning language, and by his inversion of syllables, Klee must have sensed something of the tension between our biological instincts and the social conventions of reading and writing. Although speaking comes naturally,¹²¹ reading does not. And even if children outgrow their difficulties—except for those stricken with severe

learning disabilities—the problems they face while learning to read tell us a great deal about the mind. Specifically, how artificial and contrived reading and writing actually are, and, even if ancient biological abilities have been adapted to this new skill, performing it may require leaving some of our own primary instincts behind, not least of which is our acute sensitivity to what is invariant in symmetrical images.¹²²

In keeping with his penchant to reverse the hands of time, it was, no doubt, an attempt—however intuitive—to recover something of the ambidexterity of the pre-reading brain that

¹¹⁸ Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 272.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 264.

¹²¹ See Stephen Pinker, *The Language Instinct* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1995).

¹²² Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 266ff.

¹¹⁷ Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 155.

Klee hoped to tap by prompting his students to draw with both hands, or subjecting letters to mirror symmetry experiments in his Bauhaus studies. Even more startling, and difficult to explain, is how those same studies closely resemble a diagram Stanislas Dehaene devised (fig. 27) to distinguish the different areas of the brain, and the hierarchical levels and discrete degrees of specialization, at which neurons detect contrasts, contours, character shapes, individual letters, consonants, entire words and word combinations—the very neuronal chain of command, as it were, that sets the process of reading into motion.¹²³ Since Klee was unacquainted with these findings, any similarity between his pedagogical sketches (fig. 26) and present-day diagrams of brain mechanisms responsible for language comprehension is purely accidental, and, most likely, would never have been noticed by the present author were it not for the letter *E* being used in both cases. But Klee was not insensitive to the way the brain processes information. In notes published under the rubric *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, he intimated that our vision is limited, that the eye cannot scan entire surfaces with equal intensity. “The limitation of the eye,” he writes, “is its inability to see even a small surface equally sharp at all points. The eye must ‘graze’ over the surface, grasping sharply portion after portion, to convey them to the brain which collects and stores the impressions.”¹²⁴ Present-day neuroscientists call these eye movements “saccades”—also acknowledging that the eye takes in impressions only part to part, and then remits those impressions to the brain, where they finally coalesce into holistic impressions. These limitations constrain our reading ability, since we are able to identify only about ten or twelve letters per saccade.¹²⁵ Intriguingly, Jean Laude writes that Klee was describing a procedure analogous to that of reading in the proper sense of the term,¹²⁶ in which case, the similarity between Klee’s Bauhaus studies and Dehaene’s diagram may not be that coincidental after all.

If permitted to speculate as to what this similarity might signify, one could propose that, just as Klee regressed from the alphabetic to the hieroglyphic, from the unidirectional to the multi-directional, and from the lexical to the phonic, he also stymied full access to word identity. Given his propensity, as Aichele so aptly put it, for “syntactical peculiarities that have a particularly disorienting effect,”¹²⁷ then, in that same spirit, Klee concocted scenarios that, though unbeknownst to him, derailed the functioning of neural mechanisms that support word recognition. Allowing us—just barely—to recognize letters, but prohibiting them from forming consonants, let alone intelligible words or word combinations, Klee manufactured a kind of cerebral traffic jam. Beneath his art’s look of innocence, and his apparent playful temperament, Klee labored to hold our full understanding in check, perhaps hoping to learn something, however rudimentary or basic, from the frustration or lack of fulfillment experienced as a result.

An important element unaddressed in Dehaene’s diagram, yet directly relevant to any investigation of Klee’s aesthetic production, is how the brain processes the very physicality of writing. As intimated above, the limited space the retina registers at any given moment constrains reading just as the size and range of our hand and wrist motion constrains writing. All the same, writing, in our culture at least, varies from highly regimented, mechanical typeface to the most spontaneous forms of calligraphy, the latter often displaying no less variety and expressivity than individual strokes on a painted canvas.

Prone to experiment, Klee varied the technique with which he executed his marks.¹²⁸ Sometimes, he courted a typographic quality, leaving the impression that his manner was impersonal and unemotional; at other times, he nearly incised his marks into thickly applied layers of paint, like a scribe writing on a clay tablet as old as the script itself (fig. 24). By evoking a distant past, Klee endowed some of his images, as Charles Haxthausen has argued, with a certain “auratic” quality, as if his piece, rare and priceless, warranted preservation in an archaeological museum.¹²⁹ Perchance, Klee appreciated writing’s ability to give ideas a lasting physical presence they do not otherwise possess,¹³⁰ a dichotomy that also evokes the lag between having an immaterial idea and its literal inscription, the temporariness of one and the endurance of the other. But even as they leave enduring physical traces behind, different scripts do not perdure equally. Ancient languages can bequeath a set of symbols for posterity even as they themselves become extinct: e.g., although we still use Latin script in Western Europe and the Americas, the original language has fallen out of common usage. This discrepancy between the permanent and the impermanent, the graphic marks and their meanings, might have intrigued Klee, perhaps because this condition approximates that of art. If written long ago, an inscription’s message, for all intents and purposes, is subject to erosion, even loss. The same applies to works of art, even those created in the present, if the audience remains insensitive to the artist’s worldview. Feeling misunderstood, Klee could have associated his work with ancient scripts whose markings endure physically, but whose meanings do not. Even as he forged these associations, transcribing such scripts literally and factually in his work was unfeasible. Unfeasible, not simply because Klee was no plagiarist,¹³¹ but because he could not exclude their potential decipherment in the future, in which case his point about the erosion of meaning would be defeated. To mark the erasure of meaning, Klee, ironically enough, had to erase meaning from his marks.

A similar interest may have motivated him to combine antithet-

123 Ibid., 151.

124 Paul Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, trans. Sibyl Maholy-Nagy (New York: Praeger, 1953), 33.

125 Dehaene, *Reading in the Brain*, 16.

126 Laude, “Paul Klee,” 365.

127 Aichele, *Paul Klee’s Pictorial Writing*, 208.

128 Vogel, *Zwischen Wort und Bild*, 136.

129 See also Charles Werner Haxthausen, “Zwischen Darstellung und Parodie: Klees ‘auratische’ Bilder,” in Paul Klee: *Kunst und Karriere: Beiträge des internationalen Symposiums in Bern*, ed. Oskar Bächtchmann and Josef Helfenstein (Bern: Stämpfli, 2000), 9–26.

130 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 17. See also Paul Klee, “Philosophie de la création,” in *Théorie de l’art moderne* (Paris: Gonthier-Méditation, 1964), 58.

131 Aichele, *Paul Klee’s Pictorial Writing*, 185.

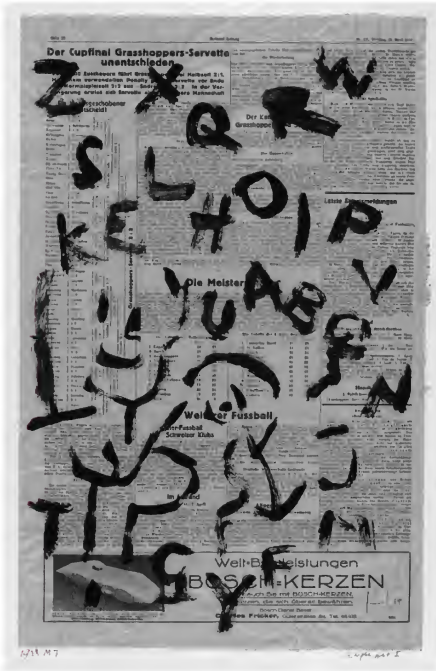


Fig. 28: Paul Klee, *Alphabet I*, 1938/187. Colored paste on newspaper on cardboard, 53.9 x 34.4 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

ical means of execution, painting freely over newspaper (fig. 28), leaving the mechanically-reproduced print visible underneath, as though layers of sedimentation had accrued over a body of information through time. Reluctant to confine himself to a single technique, Klee combined the personal and the impersonal—what was done by hand versus what was done by machine—in the same visual field. In this respect, of course, his work betrays an unmistakable debt to Picasso and Braque, whose invention of collage, and incorporation of newsprint in the domain of high art, provide the obvious precedent.¹³² Klee broke new ground, however, by seeking the effect, not of mechanical impersonality or historical impermanence, but of rapid spontaneity (fig. 29). He obviously appreciated the calligraphic quality of writing, hoping to collapse the differences between painting and drawing.¹³³ And by giving the impression of working in an improvisational, even gestural, manner, he stressed the concept of art, not as a finished product, but as a process,¹³⁴ anticipating not so much



Fig. 29: Paul Klee, *Embrace (Umgriff)*, 1939/1121. Paste color, watercolor, and oil on paper, 24 x 131 cm, Collection Dr. Bernhard Sprengel, Hanover.

surrealist automatism as abstract expressionism.¹³⁵

Given his fascination with beginnings, Klee's interest in spontaneity might have been piqued by the gestural characteristics of children's drawings. As James Smith Pierce wrote: "The first marks made by a child, as Klee learned from watching his son Felix, are only meaningless scribbles. There is no question of representation. The lines are nothing more than visual records of manual motions and at first the child is not even aware of the connection between the motion and the marks."¹³⁶ Not surprisingly, among the key concerns Klee voiced in his *Notebooks* was for movement: "the active movement from us to the work; the communication of the work's mobility to others, the beholders of the work."¹³⁷ In later years, Klee increasingly opted toward a more gestural, improvisational mode,¹³⁸ perhaps due to a debilitating illness that inhibited his manual dexterity,¹³⁹ and, in so doing, established the new style upon which his popularity among European surrealists and American abstract expressionists largely rests. According to Clement Greenberg, a champion of this new generation of American artists, Klee "would often begin a drawing with no definitive intention or idea in mind, guided by nothing but the automatic movements of his hand, letting the line go of its own accord until it was recaptured by unplanned, accidental resemblances. These resemblances would be improved upon and elaborated," a process that "recapitulated the very beginnings of graphic art, the development from aimless scrawling to the representation of recognizable objects."¹⁴⁰

135 See Andrew Kagan, "Paul Klee's Influence on American Painting: New York School," *Arts Magazine* 49, no. 10 (June 1975): 54–59, Carolyn Lanchner, "Klee in America," in Lanchner, *Paul Klee*, 83–111, and Helfenstein and Turner, *Klee and America*.

136 Pierce, *Klee and Primitive Art*, 85.

137 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 169.

138 *Ibid.*, 455.

139 See, for example, Robert Kudielka, *Paul Klee: The Nature of Creation, Works 1914–1940* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2002), 161.

140 Greenberg, "On Paul Klee," 72.

132 See also Jim M. Jordan, *Paul Klee and Cubism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

133 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 455.

134 See Laude, "Paul Klee," 349.

Although frequently mentioned, scholars have yet to connect this aspect of Klee's work to the conviction shared by many present-day linguists that communication originated, not in primitive vocalization, but in gesture or signing.¹⁴¹ Though largely overlooked by art historians, this coincidence provides a critical interpretive nexus where art, language, and cognition intersect, a nexus that relates directly to Klee's strong interest in the birth of communication. The primacy of motion, in fact, was never far from his mind: "Initially," he wrote, "there is but one principle: to move."¹⁴² This proposition seems persuasive enough: even the most basic microscopic organism seems animated by a primordial urge to stir. Still, from this primitive, instinctual motility to the invention of complex forms of communication such as language lies a seemingly unbridgeable gap. Upon reflection, however, the growing consensus among present-day linguists that communication actually began with rudimentary signing makes perfect sense. Imagine the following scenario: a group of thirsty hominids look to quench their thirst and unexpectedly come upon strangers whose language they find incomprehensible. While emitting arbitrary sounds is unlikely to advance communication—because addresser and addressee share no common code—gesture fits the bill perfectly. The leader of the first group might simulate the act of cupping water, pretending to drink, all the while looking bemused as if he were desperately in need of something. To supply an appropriately intelligible response, all the leader of the second group need do is point in the direction of a stream or pond. And since gestures are interactive, they may be repeated as often as is necessary for the desired response to be elicited. Going further back in time, it stands to reason that, within discrete social groups, language could also have emerged, independently and similarly, as improvisational signing, not as formal discourse.

Requiring direct eye contact and unfettered hands, signing has obvious drawbacks. Vocalizations, on the other hand, reach anyone within earshot and afford the possibility to multitask. No wonder, verbalization gradually overtook signing, just as phonetic writing displaced hieroglyphs and pictographs. But even if vocalization eventually won the day—sign language excepted—many individuals still "speak with their hands," adding gestures to speech for emphasis or rhetorical force. According to researchers such as David McNeill, however, these are not simply residues of language's more gesticular ancestry; they should actually be "regarded as parts of *language itself*—not as embellishments or elaborations, but as integral parts of the processes of language and its use."¹⁴³ These issues relate directly to Klee's art. As is well known, he sought to reinvent painting as if from scratch. "I want to be as though newborn....," he declared, "ignoring facts and fashions, to be almost primitive."¹⁴⁴ Yet casting off convention was no exercise in radicality for its own sake;

among the original motivations behind creativity, Klee insisted, is communication: "the initial impulse in ourselves, the actual progressive carrying out of the work itself, and then getting the work across to others, to the beholders—these are the chief stages of the creative act."¹⁴⁵ Intriguingly, and consistent with the present-day thesis that language emerged through signing, Klee associated the birth of writing with motion. "The Genesis of the script," Klee professed, provides "a splendid parable of movement. The work of art, too, is experienced by us first of all as a process of creation, rather than as a passive product. The creative impulse suddenly springs to life, like a flame, passes through the hand onto the canvas, where it spreads further until, like the spark that closes an electric circuit, it returns to its source: the eye and the mind."¹⁴⁶ To this end, artists must stress the "expressive motions of the brush, the genesis of the effect."¹⁴⁷ "The work as human action (genesis)," he concludes, "is movement both in the productive and the receptive sense."¹⁴⁸

Thus, though a discussion of gesture might seem irrelevant to Klee's engagement with language, the artist's own association of script, movement, and the workings of the mind—in concert with the current postulate that language, gesture, and thought are intimately linked—warrants its inclusion in this study.¹⁴⁹ In addition, many painters feared visual ideas becoming stale through excessive calculation and re-working; lest an image be spoiled, better make few preparatory sketches and transcribe one's vision as quickly as possible. Klee endorsed this attitude with a vengeance: whenever "a type grows beyond the stage of its genesis," he declared, "the intensity gets lost very quickly."¹⁵⁰ The desire to remain improvisational, then, was not simply a visual or technical issue: it was, by Klee's own admission, a means to sustain the freshness of a work and establish an empathetic relationship between the observer and the artist's process of creation ("the communication of the work's mobility to others, the beholders of the work"). This relationship could allegedly function independently of artistic conventions and even approximate the original act of communication: the birth of language in physical gesture, as a system of signing, not as the manipulation of arbitrary signs, as in vocalization. For Klee, even figuration was "connected with the concept of movement."¹⁵¹ On this point, it might also be relevant to add, if only parenthetically, that those very patients mentioned above, whose brain injuries prevented them from recognizing letters, could nonetheless manage to write them out by hand, or recognize their outlines if physically traced on their own bodies.¹⁵² It would indeed be difficult to devise a better defense of the intimate link between language and movement.

145 Ibid., 373.

146 Ibid., 99.

147 Klee, *Diaries*, #640.

148 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 357.

149 This is not to say, of course, that Klee was the only artist to have connected physical movement with originary language (even Hugo Ball, a leading Dadaist, mused whether sign language was "the real language of paradise" [Ball, *Flight out of Time: A Dada Diary* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 104]).

150 Klee, *Diaries*, #928.

151 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 26.

152 Dehoene, *Reading in the Brain*, 57.

141 See Michael Tomasello, *Origins of Human Communication* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2008).

142 Klee, *The Nature of Nature*, 13.

143 David McNeill, *Gesture and Thought* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2007), 13.

144 Grahmann, *Poul Klee*, 41.



Fig. 30: Paul Klee, *Kettledrummer (Paukenspieler)*, 1940/270. Colored paste on paper on cardboard, 34.6 x 21.2 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

KETTLEDRUMMER: A CASE STUDY

This link is poignantly discernible in *Kettledrummer (Paukenspieler)* of 1940 (fig. 30). O. K. Werckmeister interprets the piece's overall configuration as a variation on the swastika, an obvious allusion to Nazi brutality, with the red areas referencing the blood spilled by the countless victims of this totalitarian regime.¹⁵³ Though compelling, not all scholars have accepted this interpretation. Franciscono prefers to see the piece as commemorating Heinrich Knauer, the percussionist of the Dresden Opera Orchestra,¹⁵⁴ a reading buttressed by an anecdote related by Will Grohmann: "I remember [Klee] saying that one evening in the excitement of drawing he had the feeling that he was striking a kettledrum."¹⁵⁵ This revealing admission bespeaks the artist's thrill at having physically elicited the activity his work was depicting, and establishing the very sympathetic/empathetic relationship between work and audience mentioned above (although,

153 O. K. Werckmeister, *Versuche über Paul Klee* (Frankfurt: Syndikat, 1981), 117–18, 191.

154 Franciscono, *Paul Klee*, 373.

155 Grohmann, *Paul Klee*, 349.

見 *sehen*, 見 *alt* 見 *ein Auge auf zwei Beinen laufend*

Fig. 31: Explanation of the Chinese Character for "Seeing," in Weule, *Vom Kerbstock zum Alphabet*, 54.

when using the term "audience" here, one must remember to include the artist as well). How this relationship is set in motion is well worth exploring, even if it has received little sustained attention in the scholarly literature.

First, *Kettledrummer* closely approximates the "pictographs" or "hieroglyphs" Klee introduced in previous works. Smith Pierce has already connected Klee's *Abduction (Entführung)* (1928) to the old Chinese character for "seeing" in Weule's *Vom Kerbstock zum Alphabet* (fig. 31): "a combination of two independent schemata—the eye that sees and the diagonal legs that move."¹⁵⁶ This same character serves as a likely prototype, with modifications, for *Kettledrummer*: the eye was retained and the legs eliminated, replaced by arms in the process of beating a drum. If only on these grounds, *Kettledrummer* fits very comfortably within the compass of Klee's exploration of language. For all that, the pictographic image remains difficult to interpret. Many individuals to whom the author of this essay showed the work did not automatically identify the figure as a drummer, although, once the title was disclosed, they retroactively recognized the reference and even deemed it appropriate (reinforcing Klee's avowal that a work of art begins with the title, or, more accurately, that its meaning is often contingent upon it). The single central eye, by virtue of being so conspicuous, dominates the piece. The vertical shape at the upper left, by contrast, is so abstracted and physically disconnected from the main figure's anatomy that it registers, at least at first glance, as a separate form, comparable to the abstract signs Klee often combined with figural shapes or landscape elements. But a comparable, though longer, form sprouts from below the dark outline of the head, compelling the spectator to interpret it as a neck extending into a shoulder and, finally, into a downturned arm. In that context, the abstracted form at the upper left—despite being detached—now reads differently: namely, as the figure's right arm, an arm extended upward.

Once the title guides our identification of the figure, we marshal our powers of projection to fashion not only a head out of a few rudimentary strokes, but also hands from the small circles at the termination of the arms. What is more, we infer these hands as clasping the drumsticks the artist did not condescend to depict because he assumed, cleverly and rightly, that the audience would conjure them in their imagination. Alternatively, we might read the arms as extending into drumsticks themselves, with the circles, not as clasping hands, but as the mallets at their tips—now a part of, rather than an appendage to, the figure's schematic anatomy. Reinforcing this reading is Klee's 1939 drawing, *Old Fiddler (alter Geiger)* (fig. 32), in which face and violin, human form and musical instrument, likewise merge into a single form.¹⁵⁷ At this point, it is also worth mentioning how technically

156 Pierce, *Klee and Primitive Art*, 147.

157 Klee, *His Life and Work*, 99.

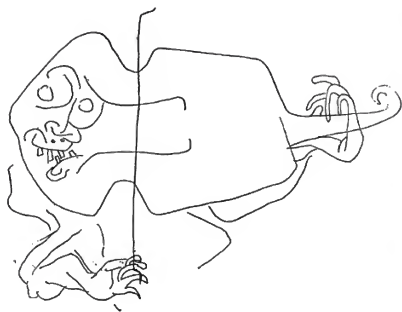


Fig. 32: Paul Klee, *Old Fiddler* (alter Geiger), 1939/310. Pencil on paper on cardboard, 20.9 x 29.7 cm, location unknown.



Fig. 33: Honoré Daumier (1808–79), *Street Scene with a Mountebank Playing a Drum*, c. 1865. Drawing in pen and watercolor over black chalk, 33.5 x 25.5 cm, British Museum, London, Bequeathed by César Mange de Hauke, PD 1968-2-10-30.

(and experientially) difficult the suggestion of motion proves in a static idiom such as painting. A falling object, for instance, is nearly impossible to evoke on canvas as one can never be sure whether the object is falling, rising, or simply levitating in mid-air. To avoid such confusion, visual artists—lest the effect of



Fig. 34: William Morris Hunt (1824–79), *The Drummer Boy*, 1862. Oil on canvas, 91.8 x 66.7 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mrs. Samuel H. Wolcott, 66.1055.

movement be mitigated, if not compromised altogether—tend to depict actions at their onset or conclusion, never in mid-stream. Klee obviously took such advice to heart: he raised one of his drummer's hands to simulate the beginning of the action—an "upstroke"—and lowered the other to simulate its completion—a "downblow" (in drumming terminology). That reliable painterly practice not only heightened the sensation of movement; it also helped evoke the very kind of drumming Klee had in mind. We do not envisage the drummer tapping the drum lightly, or even producing a drum roll with both arms staying below shoulder height—as in Honoré Daumier's *Street Scene* (fig. 33)—but beating the drum loudly, raising his hands, alternatively, one at a time, well above his head—not unlike the figure in, say, William Morris Hunt's *The Drummer Boy* (fig. 34).

Figure and title thus contribute something different to the construction of meaning: in effect, word and image are co-expressive without being redundant.¹⁵⁸ By itself, the image provides insufficient information to denote the figure unambiguously as a drummer; and the title insufficient information to denote the *kind of drumming* performed. Image and title thus combine to form a unit of meaning that conveys more than language and gesture do in isolation. In this respect, Klee's piece approximates a colloquial conversation where a speaker mentions the act of

¹⁵⁸ McNeill, *Gesture and Thought*, 22.

drumming, simultaneously gesturing toward the listener with both hands in a manner similar to that portrayed in Morris Hunt's painting. The verbal report provides one piece of information, the gesture another: this is what is meant by speech and gesture being co-expressive without being redundant, and why David McNeill argues that gestures should be regarded as parts of language rather than superfluous embellishments. As we filter information from verbal and visual inputs, we construct an overarching scenario wherein both are interpretively consistent,¹⁵⁹ a largely intuitive rather than purely intellectual exercise. At issue, then, is not valorizing one over the other as it is underscoring how they mutually reinforce the construction of meaning.¹⁶⁰

What distinguishes the gesture from the verbal report, however, is that the former becomes, quite literally, a material carrier of the idea.¹⁶¹ This materiality, in turn, endows the information conveyed with enhanced concreteness, an advantage that explains why we gesture while speaking—not only to help us think and add rhetorical emphasis to our speech, but also to deliver our message with greater specificity. The same may be said of Klee's image. Comparing it to Daumier's, we infer, even on the basis of a few reductive strokes, a great deal about the kind of drumming performed. In Daumier, the range of motion is narrower, the speed of the drumming faster, the sound continuous, and the mood of the playing, in spite of the clown's severe facial expression, festive. (In a way, there is a kind of asynchrony or mismatch between Daumier's drummer and his playing.¹⁶²) In Klee, by contrast, the range of motion is greater, the sound discontinuous, the speed slower, the tones darker and heavier, and the mood somber, even ominous.

The energetic quality of Klee's representation, moreover—even when compared to Hunt's—is enhanced by the application of gestural strokes whose seemingly forceful execution introduces a temporal, kinetic component to the spectator's experience of the work. Klee was highly cognizant of line's potential to connote a temporal dimension as we track its course, a progress inscribed in time, as opposed, he claimed, to our grasping of a plane, the



Fig. 35: Franz Klee (1910–62), *Mahoning*, 1956. Oil and paper collage on canvas, 203.2 x 254 cm, Whitney Museum of American Art, NY, Purchase with funds from the Friends of the Whitney Museum of American Art, 57.10.

surface of which is perceived instantaneously.¹⁶³ Paradoxically, this contradicts Klee's other statement cited earlier, about the eye's "inability to see even a small surface equally sharp at all points" and need to scan a surface "portion after portion." (But this would hardly be the first instance of an artist contradicting him- or herself.) For our purposes, then, the appropriate contrast to target is less that between a line and a plane as that between the tracking of a line and the comprehension of language: in this case, following a trajectory versus reading a title. On this point, McNeill argues that: "When co-expressive speech and a gesture synchronize, we see something that is both simultaneous and sequential."¹⁶⁴ This observation is highly suggestive: if we take Klee's title as standing for "speech," and the rapid brushwork as standing for "gesture," then our reading of *Kettledrummer* is also simultaneous and sequential.

While reading the title, we understand—almost instantaneously—the artist's ambition to depict drumming, and, while perusing the piece, we experience—slowly and sequentially—how the lines on the painting satisfy this purpose, and, more to the point, the *kind* of drumming Klee hoped to convey. Indeed, the gestural strokes vividly suggest both the heaviness and directionality of the drummer's movements,¹⁶⁵ fulfilling the ambition Grahmann ascribed to Klee: to have the audience feel as though they were not simply watching someone hit a drum, but

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 92ff.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁶³ Paul Klee, cited in Paul Klee, ed. Jean-Louis Prat and Antoni Tapies, exh. cat. (St. Paul-de-Vence: Fondation Maeght, 1977), 30.

¹⁶⁴ McNeill, *Gesture and Thought*, 91.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 185.

performing the activity themselves. Of course, since artists are highly adept at “hiding their tracks,” one should never assume that traces left on canvas or paper transparently reveal the speed of their execution. Many artists even delighted in fooling their audience, as is attested by a charming anecdote related by the American painter Philip Guston about Franz Kline, an artist whose work often falls under the rubric of “action painting,” and whose mode of execution looks, and should theoretically be, even more spontaneous and improvisational than Klee’s (fig. 35). After watching him work, however, Guston recalled how Kline would spend “days or weeks reworking the edge of a stroke to give the impression that it was painted with intensity and élan.”¹⁶⁶ Kline himself admitted: “Some of the pictures I work on a long time and they look as if I’ve knocked them out.... Immediacy can be accomplished in a picture that’s been worked on for a long time just as well as if it’s done rapidly.”¹⁶⁷ It is critical, therefore, not to confuse a painting with its effect, and to remember that artists wield a variety of devices to beguile the spectator into making certain assumptions about process, assumptions that do not necessarily correspond to the way a painting was actually made. In fact, Klee frequently reworked his own compositions, just as he did his diaries, revealing how carefully he crafted both the images he painted and the image he constructed for his public.

How *Kettledrummer* was executed, therefore, is less relevant for our purposes than the impression Klee sought to manufacture: namely, that the piece was completed swiftly and energetically. (For any work of art to “be successful,” he professed, “it is necessary never to work towards a conception of the picture completely thought out in advance.”¹⁶⁸) The more we accept his strokes as rapid, the more effective the evocation of drumming. To this end, Klee’s training as a musician proved a considerable advantage. Though they appear continuous and fluid, most bodily movements follow certain sequences: preparations, holding patterns, strokes, post-stroke holds, and retractions¹⁶⁹—sequences that apply all the more to the playing of musical instruments. Perusing *Kettledrummer* with these ideas in mind, especially given that it respects the aesthetic rule of depicting an action at its inception or at its close, one gets a visceral sense of repetitive rhythm, in all likelihood because one also infers the preparations, holds, strokes, post-holds, and retractions of each upstroke and down-blow. And if such sequential phases pertain to the playing of musical instruments, they also pertain, though perhaps to a lesser degree, to the physical activity of painting and writing. As artists prepare to apply paint to canvas, they might visualize their intent in their minds, rehearse the stroke in the air before making physical contact with the canvas, and may even repeat the stroke in the air after completion, all before contemplating whether the effect created is the appropriate one. The same applies to the physical act of writing and even speaking (especially as one

accelerates or decelerates one’s cadence, introduces dramatic pauses, or raises or lowers one’s voice).

The import of Will Grohmann’s recollection—of Klee’s excitement over the feeling of striking a drum while drawing—can now be better appreciated, cementing the relevance of gesture to Klee’s artistic philosophy, and, more broadly, to language and thought. In fact, this anecdote also echoes recent debates as to whether gestures are enacted for the benefit of the speaker, so that ideas are formulated properly and the right words used, or for the benefit of the audience, so that particular points are successfully conveyed. The evidence, as is almost always the case in such debates, points in both directions. Congenitally blind individuals gesture while they speak, even to each other, suggesting that gestures enhance the speaker’s expression;¹⁷⁰ but deaf children, even those ignorant of sign language, spontaneously invent signs to petition adults, suggesting that gestures are communicative.¹⁷¹ If Grohmann’s recollection is accurate, *Kettledrummer* also suggests that painter and audience mutually benefit from a gesture’s enactment.¹⁷² Klee sought to contrive a specific impression for his audience, and obviously experienced great personal delight in having pulled it off.

One may also interject that, in everyday situations, gestures vary from insignificant gesticulations that accompany speech all the way to conventional signs (“thumbs up” or signaling “OK”), pantomime, and formal sign language.¹⁷³ Each betrays different characteristics, fulfills different functions, and engenders different meanings. Insofar as *Kettledrummer* is concerned, the image arguably lies somewhere in the middle of this complex continuum, depicting neither meaningless gesticulation nor a purely conventionalized sign for drumming. (In sign language, incidentally, the gesture for drumming is closer to Daumier’s painting than to Klee’s or Hunt’s). By moving to the middle of this spectrum, Klee opens the possibility that the broader meaning of his image is not simply gestural or iconic, but metaphorical. In metaphor, after all, literal situations are employed to convey non-literal ones: e.g., the “drum beat” of life, of a nation, or even of people’s hearts. At the conclusion of *Walden*, to cite a famous example, Henry David Thoreau writes: “If a man does not keep pace with his companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which he hears, however measured or faraway.”¹⁷⁴

In this case, drumming is not meant literally, but figuratively, not to describe a physical activity, but to connote an abstract principle. For the metaphor to work, however, the connection between the abstract principle (an individual’s lifestyle) and the literal situation connoting it (the beating of a drum) cannot be entirely arbitrary: the analogy must somehow strike us as appropriate. Yet that relationship still stands as culture-specific

166 Harry Gaugh, “Franz Kline: The Man and the Myth,” *ARTnews* 84 (Dec. 1985): 62.

167 Franz Kline cited in Clifford Ross, ed., *Abstract Expressionism: Creators and Critics* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1990), 101.

168 Klee, *Diaries*, #857.

169 McNeill, *Gesture and Thought*, 31–32.

170 Jana Iverson and Susan Goldin-Meadow, “What’s Communication Got To Do with It? Gesture in Congenitally Blind Children,” *Developmental Psychology* 33, no. 3 (1997): 453–67.

171 McNeill, *Gesture and Thought*, 45–47.

172 *Ibid.*, 53ff.

173 *Ibid.*, 5–7.

174 Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854; London: W. J. Gage, 1888), 323.



Fig. 36: Hitler Youth Poster, 1935. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

(because the members of some cultures may, and others may not, recognize that association as suitable).¹⁷⁵ It is for this reason that Werckmeister's interpretation of *Kettledrummer* remains compelling—especially in view of the Nazi threat overtaking Europe, and of Klee himself having suffered from it personally, being forced to relinquish his teaching post in Germany. In fact, Klee often made satirical references to the Nazis in his work,¹⁷⁶ and many propagandist images of Hitler Youth beating drums (fig. 36) were disseminated during the Nazi period, apparently to galvanize the population into feeling loyalty for a regime whose authority hinged on being intimately associated with the fatherland. Klee could thus be turning a propagandist image into its sinister opposite, showing the dark ferocity behind the sanitized pictures of health and enthusiasm the Nazis labored to publicize. Even so, this connection does not preclude Klee's painting from signifying a range of meanings. From the politically and personally specific to the abstract and philosophical, the image could signify the Nazi takeover, the tragedy of fate, or the imminence of death (that of the percussionist of the Dresden Opera Orchestra, or even the artist's own). Holbein's *The Bride and Bridegroom*

¹⁷⁵ See McNeill, *Gesture and Thought*, 48ff.

¹⁷⁶ Alexander Zschokke, "Begegnung mit Paul Klee," *Die Schweizerische Monatszeitschrift* [Oct. 1948]: 74–76; cited in O. K. Werckmeister, "From Revolution to Exile," in Lanchner, *Paul Klee*, 39–63.



Fig. 37: Hans Holbein (c. 1497–1543), *The Bride and Bridegroom* (*Die Verliebten*), in *The Dance of Death*, c. 1524–26. Woodcut, 6.5 x 4.8 cm, Kunstmuseum Basel.

(fig. 37) has also been proposed as a prototype for Klee's piece, and with good reason, as a drummer has long been judged an appropriate metaphor for the ever-present threat of mortality. Death is relentless; its beat unremitting, the rhythm of which we may ignore but ultimately cannot escape. We think that we step to the music we chose, but with all due respect to Thoreau, it is death that plays the tune. Note that the Hitler Youth poster and the Holbein both have the drummer's hands raised above his head—like's Klee's image—implying that the beat is slow, heavy, and repetitive, and the call an especially urgent one, a condition that applies equally to Hunt's painting, since its purpose was to incite young men to volunteer for the Union army during the Civil War.

No single interpretive scheme, of course, will exhaust the meanings of *Kettledrummer*, to say nothing of Klee's visual and intellectual engagement with the linguistic as a whole. But comparing the image to other depictions of drumming, as well as analyzing it in light of the way gesture and verbal language complement each other, allows different facets of this painting, and of Klee's aesthetics in general, to emerge in sharper focus. As a result, one may propose that any investigation of Klee's relationship to language benefits from broadening its definition of the linguistic to include gesture and movement. The more elastic our definition, the more of Klee's diverse sources and ideas may be included in the conversation, and the more complete our analyses of the numerous questions raised by his engagement with the linguistic. Advantageously, art historical investigations would

also align with current views in communication theory: that, if gesture did not actually precede vocalization, it at least functioned as its important auxiliary from the very first time human beings started to communicate.

KLEE, CHILDHOOD, AND THE BIRTH OF LANGUAGE

If Klee appropriated pictographic forms in his work, as well as the idea that certain alphabets reversed the orientation of select letters, he also intuited that topographical shapes inspired the configuration of writing, and the extent to which motion and gesture contribute to communication. He then amalgamated these disparate ideas and elements to evoke, in his own words, the “primitive beginnings of art.”¹⁷⁷ His concern was with the origins of things: of art, of communication, of language. “The spirit [is] at its purest,” he declared, “in the beginning.”¹⁷⁸ “Primitive feelings are the strongest.”¹⁷⁹

These interests also intersect with his admiration for children’s art, a topic that deservedly received much attention in the art historical literature. Klee included select childhood drawings in his oeuvre catalogue, and felt considerable pride upon their rediscovery.¹⁸⁰ But it is equally worth stating that this interest is clearly time-bound and culture-specific, reflecting ideas voiced by numerous artists and thinkers throughout the early twentieth century. Disillusioned with what they saw as the depersonalization of an increasingly materialistic culture, and with the rejection of both the imagination and the supernatural in positivistic philosophy, numerous painters, from Gauguin onward, sought to regain a naïve, innocent perception of the world, one ostensibly uncorrupted by what they denounced as the decadent, over-refinement of modern Western culture. In the discourse surrounding modernism, terms previously intended for censure—“simple,” “awkward,” and “childish”—now morphed into terms of approbation.¹⁸¹ Curiously enough, the possibility that a childlike vision could be literally accessed was commonly endorsed at the turn of the twentieth century, primarily on account of the widely disseminated postulate that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny: the idea that individuals recapitulate the evolution of the species as a whole.¹⁸² Though very few would countenance such ideas today,

many artists at the time took them to heart.¹⁸³ In 1922, when Hans Prinzhorn, a psychiatrist trained in both art history and philosophy, published a study on the art of the mentally ill, he readily connected his subject with the art of children and non-Western cultures. The book was also circulated at the Bauhaus after its publication, and Klee’s keen interest in its illustrations has been widely documented.¹⁸⁴

It would therefore be exceedingly naïve to assume that Klee simply resurrected the birth of communication, or that he was himself endowed with the childlike innocence some of his early supporters and detractors imputed to him. The artist’s statements cited throughout this essay evince the extent of his acute self-awareness in many matters artistic. He may not have been as knowledgeable about language- and image-processing as present-day neuroscientists and cognitivists, but, if his Bauhaus Notebooks betray anything, it is how deliberate and thoughtful he was about his métier. His teaching diagrams reveal an inordinate sensitivity to the subtle differences and nuances that ensue from the slightest alteration of line, shape, tone, or color. Even if his appreciation for outsider art was genuine and deeply felt, it was no less of a strategic move. On its basis, he could allege a distance from anything programmatic, and persuade his audience that his art remained untainted by the calculating, selfish motives of adults, a recurrent leitmotif in the writings of expressionist artists.¹⁸⁵ [As related above, Klee described himself as a “childish man,”¹⁸⁶ just as Egon Schiele opened an autobiographical poem with the line: “I, eternal child.”¹⁸⁷] Highly calculated, the claim of innocence knowingly resurrected an old ethical debate as to whether a genuinely good person acts morally by instinct or by intellectual deliberation. While one tradition argued in favor of rational choice (how could ethical behavior be the result of mere accident?), others argued the reverse: that an ethical person acts naturally and instinctively (if performed reluctantly, contrary to the agent’s natural inclinations, how could an action, no matter

177 Klee, *Diaries*, #905.

178 *Ibid.*, #944.

179 *Ibid.*, #323.

180 Letter to Lily Stumpf, Oct. 3, 1902, in Klee, *Briefe*, 1:273. See also Hoxhousen, *Poul Klee*, 174ff.

181 Roskill, *Klee, Kondinsky*, 1.

182 Hoping to justify the psychological relevance of ancient myths—say, that of Oedipus or Narcissus—even Freud referenced this concept, confident in its absolute scientific validity. Passed on from generation to generation, this legacy was said to contain the inescapable aspects of, and exegetical keys to, our very own psychological make-up. “The prehistory into which the dream-work leads us back,” Freud writes, “is...the individual’s prehistory, his childhood, and on the other, in so far as each individual somehow recapitulates in an abbreviated form the entire development of the human race, into phylogenetic prehistory too...symbolic connections, which the individual has never acquired by learning, may justly claim to be regarded as a phylogenetic heritage” [Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* [New York: Norton, 1966], 199]. Even our primordial fantasies, he adds, “are a phylogenetic endowment. In them the individual reaches beyond his

own experience into primaeval experience” [*ibid.*, 371].

183 Oskar Kokoschka, for one, was clearly exposed to the idea that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny from his teachers at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Vienna, who, as Carl Schorske has already remarked, were greatly appreciative of children’s drawings, on art form which, in their view, “recapitulates ostensively the childhood of peoples and the childhood of art” [Deutsche Kunst und Dekoration 22 [1908–09]: 53, quoted in Carl Schorske, *Fin-de-Siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* [New York: Knopf, 1985], 328]. Variants of the theory even appear in contemporary criticism: in a review of 1908, Alfred Wechsler wrote that, on account of his youth, Kokoschka “is at the place where the first artists began, seven, eight or more centuries ago” [W. Fred [Alfred Wechsler], “Kunstschau 1908,” *Oesterreicher Rundschau* 15 [Apr.–June 1908]: 452]. For a fuller discussion of Wechsler, see Elono Shopiro, “The Interpretation of Children’s Drawings and the Reception of Kokoschka’s Work at the Kunstschau 1908,” in *Oskar Kokoschka—aktuelle Perspektiven*, ed. Patrick Werker (Vienna: Hochschule für angewandte Kunst in Wien, 1998), 21.

184 See Roskill, *Klee, Kondinsky*, 142, and Klee, *His Life and Work*, 180–85.

185 In 1912, for instance, Egon Schiele declared that “One needs to observe and experience the world with naive, pure eyes in order to attain a great weltanschauung” [Egon Schiele: *Letters and Poems 1910–1912 from the Leopold Collection* [Munich: Prestel, 2008], 127].

186 Klee, *Diaries*, #431. For the contemporary interest in the child, see also Francisco, *Poul Klee*, 92ff.

187 See Egon Schiele, *I, Eternal Child: Paintings and Poems*, trans. Anselm Hollo [New York: Grove Press, 1988], 6.

how salutary, be called moral[?].

Klee clearly positioned himself in the latter camp, hoping the moral attributes associated with naïveté and innocence would be readily ascribed to artists, like himself, whose work and personalities allegedly betrayed those very same attributes. But since this ethical debate was never unanimously resolved, the sword cut both ways and modern artists were as often criticized as praised for appropriating formal elements of children's art.¹⁸⁸ Rudolf Arnheim, for one, decried Klee on account of populating his works with "child-like figures," satisfying "a bourgeoisie" that recovers from the terrors of the Great War with "sofa dolls and assorted grotesque knickknacks."¹⁸⁹ It was not just the accusations of crudity, incompetence, and lack of training that were directed at modernist artists. The very moral arguments they wielded boomeranged against them with equal force. For some, childhood represented a state of innocence before the corrupting influence of civilization, for others, the very corrupt condition from which civilization was at pains to emerge. "Virtually all vices fester in the mind of the child," Paul Adam declared, "...evil in adults is a sign of their not having grown up. In the taverns, in the places of debauchery, in the prisons, it is the mental tone of the child which animates and motivates."¹⁹⁰ For their part, Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero exclaimed: "What terrific criminals would children be if they had strong passions, muscular strength, and sufficient intelligence."¹⁹¹ And in his "Three Essays," Freud argued that children have a special proclivity toward cruelty because feelings of pity and empathy develop only later in life.¹⁹² At the turn of the twentieth century, therefore, the image of child bifurcates: a state of fragility and innocence, or one of criminality and perversion—a state of grace before the fall, or one of bestiality and instinct before civilization.¹⁹³ Klee might have been affected no less by unrealistically negative than by unrealistically positive accounts of children, and may thus have formulated a more nuanced view. Describing one of his own images—*The Child with a Pear*—he wrote to his wife: "It has character, if also a malevolent one. The greed, the teeth, the animalistic traits should be brought out, without neglecting the childlike grace."¹⁹⁴

Klee's statements thus reveal the ambivalence with which

children were viewed in early twentieth-century culture. While he professed (in his often quoted review of 1912) that "ethnographic museums," "the nursery," and "drawings of the insane" revealed the "primordial origins of art,"¹⁹⁵ by 1930, Klee told Hans-Friedrich Geist: "Don't relate my works to those of children. They are worlds apart."¹⁹⁶ This radical about-face might be attributable to Klee's working under such remarkably diverse cultures and political regimes as the German Empire, the Weimar Republic, and the rise of the Nazis to power.¹⁹⁷

Even more decisive, perhaps, was Klee's belief, as Otto Werkmeister suspects, that child-like spontaneity was incompatible with the expertise required of someone teaching at a state-funded institution like the Bauhaus.¹⁹⁸ Smarting from the stings of critics—that he was "only a very funny and amusing copier of children's drawings"¹⁹⁹—as much as to excessive praise for the same reasons, Klee had numerous reasons to dispel that conviction. Not surprisingly, even his admirers began to distance his paintings from the creations of children. As early as 1918, for example, Theodor Däubler exclaimed that "nothing remains here of a childish effort! On the contrary: the most insignificant coincidences are ruled out: everything that Klee produces must be called totally masterly, masculine art."²⁰⁰

Däubler is perfectly right, of course (though his use of the term "masculine" is oddly misplaced), if only because no trained eye would mistake Klee's production with anything childish. The aesthetic possibilities afforded to children are, needless to say, undeniably limited. Having no training in physical anatomy or linear perspective, academic realism or foreshortening are simply unavailable to them as workable options. This is not to make a qualitative or value judgment, only to identify the specific constraints under which any artist—child or adult—may be operating at a given time or place. As is attested by the exceptional

188 See O. K. Werkmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career, 1914–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 116–17, 235.

189 Rudolf Arnheim, "Klee Für Kinder," *Die Weltbühne* 26 (1930): 170–73.

190 Paul Adam, "Des enfants," *La revue blanche* 9 (1895): 350–53.

191 Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero, *The Female Offender* (London: Appleton, 1912), 151.

192 Sigmund Freud, "Three Essays on the History of Sexuality" [1905], in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 7 (London: Hogarth Press, 1975), 192–93.

193 On the negative image of youth in turn-of-the-century Vienna, see also Stefan Zweig's *The World of Yesterday* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964), 33: "The world about and above us, which directed all its thoughts only to the fetish of security, did not like youth; or rather it constantly mistreated it. Proud of its systematic 'progress' and of its order, bourgeois society proclaimed moderation and leisure in all forms of life as the only virtues of man; all hasty efforts to advance ourselves were to be avoided...young people, who always instinctively desire rapid and radical changes, were therefore considered a doubtful element which was to be held down or kept inactive for as long as possible.... This distrust that every young man was 'not quite reliable' was felt at that time in all circles."

194 Letter to Lily Stumpf, Nov. 5, 1905, cited in Haxthausen, *Paul Klee*, 196.

195 Paul Klee, *Die Alpen 5* (Jan. 1912): 302, reprinted in *Schriften: Rezensionen und Aufsätze*, ed. Christian Geelhaar (Cologne: DuMont, 1976), 97.

196 Hans-Friedrich Geist, "Paul Klee und die Welt des Kindes," *Werk* 37 (1950): 190–91.

197 See Werkmeister's fascinating essay, "The Issue of Childhood in the Art of Paul Klee," *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 1 (Sept. 1977): 138–51.

198 To be sure, Johannes Itten, who spearheaded the effort to get Klee appointed there, was equally fascinated with childhood: "That our play become work and our work become celebration and our celebration become play—this seems to me to be the highest accomplishment of human activity. To shape the play of forces inside us—outside us—into a festive action by way of self-oblivious work—this means to create in the children's way." See Willy Rotzler, *Johannes Itten: Werke und Schriften* (Zurich: Orell Füssli, 1972), 69. And Oscar Schlemmer, another of Klee's Bauhaus faculty colleagues, who had originally tried, unsuccessfully, to get Klee hired at Stuttgart, wrote the following about him in a diary entry of 1916: "With a minimum of line he can reveal all his wisdom. This is how a Buddha draws. Quietly, at rest with himself...the most unmonumental line, because it is searching and childlike, in order to reveal greatness.... The acts of all important men are rooted in a simple, but all-comprehensive experience." See Oscar Schlemmer, *Briefe und Tagebücher*, ed. Tut Schlemmer (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 1977), 24; also cited in Werkmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career*, 214. All the same, Itten left the Bauhaus, and the institution's growing practical and functional ethos was growing increasingly at odds with Klee's own approach to creativity. See, for example, Marcell Franconeri, "Paul Klee in the Bauhaus: The Artist as Lawgiver," *Arts Magazine* 52, no. 1 (Sept. 1977): 122–27.

199 Lisbeth Stern, "Bildende Kunst: Klee," *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 23 (1917): 708.

200 Theodor Däubler, "Paul Klee," *Das Kunstblatt* 2 (1918): 24–27.

diversity of his work, Klee, conversely, entertained and exercised numerous alternatives within a remarkably broad choice situation. He even admitted as much himself: if modern works “produce a primitive impression,” he confessed, “this ‘primitiveness’ is explained by discipline, which consists in reducing everything to a few steps. It is no more than economy.... Which is to say, the opposite of real primitiveness.”²⁰¹

Any distance Klee introduces between his work and the genuinely “primitive” is commendable, disclosing, as it does, his critical consciousness about himself and his work. Still, Klee walked as fine and delicate a line as his own *Tighrope Walker* (*Seiltänzer*) (1923; plate 20). Though he rejected childishness, he never completely disavowed its “look,” just as he occasionally rejected language without disavowing *its* look. This strategic position, in turn, allowed him to investigate how our perceptual and cognitive abilities navigate the unexpected juxtaposition of visual and conceptual elements. He loved, in his own words, “to reconcile...opposites,”²⁰² combining art and language, representation and abstraction, calculation and spontaneity, innocence and sophistication. But a particular predilection was to cull writings and scripts, pictographs or hieroglyphs, children’s drawings and scribbles, to engender formal relationships, spatial qualities, or hybrid amalgamations that, because of their ensuing ambiguities, were gradually expelled from high art and writing systems over time. This was not regression for its own sake. By reintroducing these ambiguities, Klee could reignite the very cognitive discomforts that prompted their extinction in the first place, unravel their logic, and reproduce them at will. If our visual and mental powers train us to discriminate, Klee sought to conflate: the topographic and the linguistic, the verbal and the visual, left and right orientations, the phonic and the lexical, the static and the kinetic—and then orchestrate these elements in such ways as to induce doubt and uncertainty. With some latitude, we may propose that, from an aesthetic vantage point, Klee was conducting his own investigations into the process of human communication. Just as scientific knowledge advances when brain functioning misfires, perhaps Klee learned more by frustrating than facilitating the operations of language. It was not just a question of devising ambiguous visual solutions for their own sake as determining why they provoke ambiguity, and where, along a sliding scale from most to least ambiguous, particular visual solutions fall. Though the mismatches orchestrated easily align with the modernist project of undermining traditional means of rendering space, and have been so described in the art historical literature, looking at Klee’s engagement with the linguistic from the lens of recent cognitive psychology and neuroscience reveals a far more subtle, complex, and sophisticated agenda. ■

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²⁰¹ Klee, *Diaries*, #857.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, #389.

Eliane Escoubas

A Polyphonic Painting: Paul Klee and Rhythm

In an article from 1912, Klee situates himself in the context of expressionism as opposed to impressionism:

Both invoke a decisive moment in the genesis of the work: for impressionism this is the instant in which the impression of nature is received, whereas for expressionism, it is the subsequent instant, that in which the received impression is rendered. Impressionism stops with the observation of form, rather than rising to its active construction.

And he adds a few lines later:

One particular branch of expressionism is represented by cubism.¹

Thus for Klee, a painting will not depict states of feeling, but rather will be an active construction. But what does this notion of “construction” imply? It essentially adds a sense of temporal unfolding that the impressionist painting lacks, as the famous “Schöpferische Konfession” of 1918 makes clear:

Is a painting ever born in a single moment? Certainly not! It is built up little by little, no differently than a house. And does the spectator make a tour of the work in an instant? (Often yes, alas...) On the side of the spectator also, the principal activity is temporal... The artwork is movement, it is itself a fixed movement, and is perceived in movement (the eye-muscles).²

If time is a fundamental principle of the pictorial work, then its proximity to the musical work is evident. And Klee specifies:

The musical work has the advantage of being perceived in the exact order of succession in which it had been conceived, whereas the plastic work presents the uninformed with the difficulty of not knowing where to begin. To the informed spectator, however, it presents the advantage of being able to vary the order of its reading and thus to become aware of its multiple meanings.³

¹ Paul Klee, “Die Ausstellung des Modernen Bundes im Kunsthau Zürich,” *Die Alpen* 6 [Aug. 1912], reprinted in *Schriften: Rezensionen und Aufsätze*, ed. Christian Geelhaar (Cologne: DuMont, 1976), 106–107. I would like to note that Klee was one of Heidegger’s favorite painters—see the “conversations” with Heinrich Wiegand Petzet in *Auf einen Stern zugehen: Begegnungen mit Martin Heidegger 1929 bis 1976* (Frankfurt: Societats, 1983); also see Otto Pöggeler’s reports of these conversations in *Heidegger in seiner Zeit* [Munich: Fink, 1999].

² Klee, “Beitrag für den Sammelband ‘Schöpferische Konfession,’” in *Schriften*, 120.

³ *Ibid.*, 120–21.

The pictorial work is thus not an object but an event. It does not have the fixity of an object; and to look at it is to allow oneself to be taken along varied and often unknown paths, that are "set up" in the work. This is why Klee declares: "The singular optical path no longer responds to today's needs."⁴

There would be, then, a difference between the optical eye and the pictorial eye. If the optical eye is insufficient, then what kind of eye is at issue in painting? Is it the haptic eye, a vision-touching, as Riegl defines it in *Questions of Style*? Not this either. Let us, for the moment, designate it as the "musical eye." We will encounter this again and again in the course of our analyses.

This is why Klee speaks of a "plastic polyphony,"⁵ in "Schöpferische Konfession," describing it as follows: "The separation of the elements of form, and their arrangement in subdivisions; the dislocation of this order and the reconstruction of a totality on all sides simultaneously; plastic polyphony, the achievement of repose through the equilibrium of movement, so many questions decisive for the science of forms, but not yet art in the supreme sense," adding that "polyphonic painting is superior to music in the sense that the temporal element is present in it as a spatial given."⁶

If, as he writes in 1928, "to draw and to paint is to learn to see behind a façade, to grasp something underlying, to recognize the underlying forces, to unveil,"⁷ then we shall hypothesize that it is "rhythm," as movement and time, as subjunct force, that is to be unveiled and produced. Rhythm would be this arch-sensibility, this implication of time and of movement, whose fundamental determination we find in Henri Maldiney's analyses in "The Aesthetics of Rhythm": "Art is the truth of the sensible because rhythm is the truth of *aisthesis*."⁸

In order to define rhythm, Maldiney appeals to the analyses of the Greek *ruthmos* as Benveniste elaborates it:

The Greek *ruthmos* does mean form in the sense of *schema*, but a particular kind of form that is different from the *schema*. Whereas the *schema* is fixed, realized form, posited as an object, *ruthmos* designates form in the instant in which it is taken up by that which is moving, fluid. It is improvised, momentary, modifiable form.⁹

In addition to Maldiney's analyses, we shall also refer to Pierre Sauvanet's studies in his two-volume work *Le rythme et la raison*. There, the author elaborates three criteria of analysis which he presents as "combinatorial criteria": structure (or *schema*), periodicity (*periodos*), and movement (*metabole*): "The rhythmical, in the strong sense, is both discontinuous and regular (periodicity), while allowing for a margin of irregularity (move-

ment), and presenting itself globally as a continuity (the ensemble structure-periodicity-movement)." He then calls rhythm "any perceived phenomenon to which one can attribute at least two of these three criteria."⁹

CONSTRUCTION: TECTONIC FORMS AND ENERGETIC FORMS

To construct, for Klee, is to produce a structure. For our part, we shall speak of "tectonic" and "energetic" forms. In a painting, we shall suggest, two sorts of forms are articulated, juxtaposed, mixed or opposed. The tectonic forms are lines of construction (folds, breaks, frames, dislocations, interlacings, stratifications, etc.); the others, the energetic forms, are lines of force (weights, attractions, contractions, elevations, shocks, stops, and suspensions). And these forms are not figurative forms: they are not necessarily the outlines that delimit figures or that streak across their surfaces. They are not necessarily objective lines, but lines along which the gaze is led—lines that thereby "construct" the gaze.

What then is to be understood by "construction," and by "structure"?

Klee's first works are drawings and engravings: from 1901 to 1905, he creates a cycle of eleven etchings entitled *Inventions*, which are a sort of deconstruction of natural structures. These are the famous caricatures, deformed figures—almost monstrously so—the "de-figured," so to speak, such as the *Two Men Meet*, *Each Supposing the Other to Be of Higher Rank* (*Zwei Männer, einander in höherer Stellung vermutend, begegnen sich*), *Winged Hero* (*Held m. Flügel*), or *Aged Phoenix* (*Greiser Phönix*). Here we find dislocation and deformation at the same time as construction. A construction that de-forms, a de-formation that constructs. For Klee, the issue is one of abandoning the re-production of the object. And what is more evident in caricature than the abandonment of this reproduction? Grimacing figures, disproportions, contortions, different kinds of anamorphosis, or as he writes: "the exaggeration of the ugly parts of the model." Seemingly arbitrary deformations of natural reality; in his journal he mentions Böcklin and Goya as his inspirations.

This is also why Klee recognizes his proximity to cubism, which, according to him, is (as we have seen) "a branch of expressionism." However, that in cubism to which he is attached, that which will become important later, is what he will call "numerical determination":

The cubists for their part push numerical determination to the smallest details.... Cubist reflection rests essentially on the reduction of all proportion and culminates in primordial forms, like the triangle, rectangle, and the circle.¹⁰

4 Klee, "Wege des Naturstudiums," in *Schriften*, 124–25.

5 Paul Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst* (Bern: Bentele, 1945), 17.

6 Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," 122.

7 Klee, "exacte versuche im bereich der kunst," in *Schriften*, 130.

8 Henri Maldiney, *Regard, parole, espace* (Lausanne: Éditions L'Âge d'homme, 1973), 156ff.

9 Pierre Sauvanet, *Le rythme et la raison 1: Rhythmologiques* (Paris: Kimé, 2000), 148, 195.

10 Klee, "Die Ausstellung des Modernen Bundes," 106–107. The term "reduction" has a particular meaning for Klee: it does not refer to the simple diminution of proportions but precisely to a "construction." Later, Klee's affinity with Picasso and Braque will become more evident, as will

Of course, with the etchings entitled *Inventions*, Klee has not yet arrived at the “primordial forms” of the cubists—but he will discover them. And the statement so often repeated since that time, “art does not reproduce the visible, it renders visible,” could, on a first reading (although this is not the only one possible), refer back to these deformations, these numerical determinations, reductions, and distortions.

No doubt, the superb series of drawings of angels from 1939, from the end of Klee’s life, can also be classified under this genre of “deformation.”

Yet these caricatures, like the later *Angels*, are not static, deformed forms, but rather what Klee calls dynamical forms. They are what Klee, in his Bauhaus lectures, calls “structural rhythms”: “the most primitive structural rhythms based on repetition of one sole unity in the sense of left-right or up-down.” This is a remarkable formulation insofar as it concerns precisely the notion of structure as “dividual assemblage,” which is to say as divisible assemblage—which is precisely the situation with numerical elements.¹¹

But what are we to understand by “structural rhythms”? We must go back to the Bauhaus course and “On Modern Art,” which concentrates the advances the course makes.

We can reconstitute the unfolding of structure in pictorial terms. Klee writes: “I begin logically from chaos.”¹²

Now, chaos is represented by the point, the point without breadth (geometrically defined as the intersection of two lines). If I place the tip of my pencil on the point then it becomes a line: “From the dead point, the initiation of the first act of mobility (line).”¹³ The exit from chaos is by definition a “movement.” If I prolong the line and produce other lines, I have a surface. Point, line, surface: “the specific elements of graphical art are points and energies, linear, planiform and spatial.”¹⁴

Are we re-discovering, here, a Cartesian space, defined by “figure and movement”? Perhaps, and yet Klee’s lines and surfaces have a number of very different aspects. Thus, in a sort of dream narrated a little after having described these “acts of mobility,” he writes:

The most diverse lines. Stains, blurred strokes, smooth, striated, blurred surfaces. Undulating movement. Inhibited movement. Articulated, counter movement. Braiding, weaving, masonry. Imbrication. Solo. Multiple voices. Disappearing lines in the process of being reactivated (dynamism).¹⁵

This will be an “orchestra of forms” for the eye. In this space, “The eye must graze the surface, absorb it piece by piece.”¹⁶ Thus, the horizontal and the vertical are set in place:

The vertical is the right path, the upright position or the balance of the animal. The horizontal designates its extent, its horizon. Each one is an entirely terrestrial affair, static.¹⁷

Furthermore, the upright human position is represented by the plumb line—oriented toward the center of the earth, for weight is the fundamental law of the terrestrial: everything falls. In order to avoid falling, there is only movement: an upright person will advance a foot, offset a leg in order not to stumble, not to lose balance.¹⁸ Walking is the only way of not losing balance: it is a balancing that is constantly wavering and being re-established.

A slight nudge to the plumb line and it begins to oscillate like a pendulum.¹⁹

Whence a fundamental law for Klee (as well as for cubism): balance is not symmetry. Nor is it only alternation: the tightrope walker with his balancing rod is an example of the constant conquest of equilibrium. These are what Klee calls “non-symmetrical balances” made of dissemblance and difference.

It is necessary to insist on this: the fundamental notion of balance or equilibrium that is not symmetry. This is what underlies not only the critique of perspectival painting (geometrical perspective founded on symmetry), but it is also what becomes the central notion of modern painting. Again: the fundamental law of modern painting is expressed thus: balance is not symmetry—this law, as we shall see, will be crucial to the understanding of the notion of rhythm.

Turning now to what Klee calls the “dimensions” of the painting, we arrive at the basis for the entire theory of pictorial “construction” and of its overcoming in pictorial “composition,” as explained in “On Modern Art.” The “dimensions” of the painting are line, tonality of chiaroscuro, and color. As Klee explains:

The most limited of the givens is the line—solely a matter of measure.... The tonalities or the values of chiaroscuro and the numerous gradations between white and black are a question of weight.... The colors offer other characteristics, for neither rule nor balance allow for complete mastery. I would call colors qualities.... These three guiding ideas are like

their friendship.

- 11 Paul Klee, “Bauhaus Vorlesungen 4” [Jan. 16, 1922], in *Bauhaus Vorlesungen (Weimar 1921–1922)* [facsimile reproduction] (Strasbourg: Musées de Strasbourg; Paris: Editions Hazan, 2004), 42. The “dividual” (divisible) assemblage is opposed to the individual assemblage, which is to say to the indivisible, such as an organism. Following references to the Bauhaus courses are from this facsimile, noting lecture number and date.
- 12 Paul Klee, *Tagebücher 1898–1918 (Textkritische Neuedition)*, ed. Wolfgang Kersten (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 1988), #633.
- 13 Klee, “Schöpferische Konfession,” 118.
- 14 *Ibid.*
- 15 *Ibid.*, 119.

- 16 Paul Klee, “Pädagogische Skizze: Productive und rezeptive Bewegung,” in *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 1: Das bildnerische Denken*, ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1956), 357. Also, Klee, “Bauhaus Vorlesungen 7” [Feb. 27, 1922], 98–99.
- 17 Klee, “Pädagogische Skizze,” in *Das bildnerische Denken* 147; “Bauhaus Vorlesungen 2” [Nov. 28, 1921], 24–25.
- 18 Klee, “Pädagogische Skizze, Übungen,” in *Das bildnerische Denken*, 433 and “Bauhaus Vorlesungen 2” [Nov. 28, 1921], 26. See *Tightrope Walker (Séiltanzer)* (1923; plate 20).
- 19 Klee, “Bauhaus Vorlesungen 3” [Dec. 12, 1921], 35.

three domains encapsulated in each other.²⁰

138

Therefore, line, tonality (chiaroscuro), and color are measure, weight, and quality. No doubt this is why after the first caricatures and deformations or distortions in the drawings and engravings, Klee gives himself over to tonalities around 1907–08: “I construct landscapes in black and white, painted on glass.”²¹ The tonalities—black-white, lightening-darkening—are dynamical forms.

For Klee, pictorial space is not an extension related to measure, it is an energy. It is a space of stretchings, slidings, straddlings: not a state but a process. Tonalities too are an energy from which the forms we have called “energetic” take their starting point. Where then is the distinction between what we have called “tectonic forms” and “energetic forms”? It is tonality, and above all color, that for Klee will be the true revelation of energetic forms. If there is, however, a tectonic dynamic then it is always subject to the inflexible law of free fall. It is thus purely “terrestrial” because the tectonic is the terrestrial. For the painter, the tectonic dynamic must accede to a superior form, to pure energetic form. This is where the painter moves from construction to “composition.”

“We would like henceforth to give it the musical name of composition” and he adds: “In this received form, the world is not the only world possible.”²²

There are, thus, other “possible worlds.” These are the worlds that painting will offer us. These are the “possible worlds” for which, with Klee, we shall now search.

APPEARING: THE TERRESTRIAL AND THE COSMIC

What does it mean to speak of multiple “possible worlds”? The “world” is not, nor has it ever been for Klee, a world of substance, determined once and for all and filled with beings themselves objectively determined. On the contrary, that which is painted in the painting is the insubstantiality of the world; it is the appearing of that which appears. An appearing that itself does not appear. The appearing of that which appears is varied and multiple and it has nothing to do with the notion of semblance that has always accompanied the thesis of the substantiality of the world. What the painter tries to make “manifest” is this “appearing.”

“In this point of conjunction (of the inner and outer vision of things) are rooted the forms created by the hand, completely distinct from the physical aspect of the object but which—on the other hand, from the point of view of totality—do not contradict it.” It is also a matter of “freely creating abstract forms.... These forms achieve a new nature, the nature of the work.”²³

Earlier, Klee had spoken of a “resonance between You (the object) and Me, transcending all optical relation.” Is this not, again, the distinction we had proposed between the pictorial

eye and the optical eye? Is this not what Klee is declaring in the famous phrase “art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible”? Is this not what Merleau-Ponty will call “the concentration and advent to itself of the visible”?²⁴

As is well known, toward 1911–12 Klee came into contact with the Blaue Reiter group; thus with Kandinsky, Kubin, Franz Marc, and Macke among others he collaborated on the second issue of the group’s journal.²⁵

It is above all with color that Klee will paint appearing, but never without construction. It is on the occasion of a trip to Tunisia in April 1914, with two friends from the Blaue Reiter (Moilliet and Macke), that Klee has a revelation concerning color. He writes, in his journal, on April 16, in Kairouan:

It penetrates so deeply and so gently into me, I feel it and it gives me confidence in myself without effort. Color possesses me. I don’t have to pursue it. It will possess me always, I know it. That is the meaning of this happy hour: Color and I are one. I am a painter.²⁶

Also worth mentioning are the watercolors from 1914–15, such as *Before the Gates of Kairouan* (vor den Toren v. Kairouan), *View of St. Germain* (Ansicht v. St. Germain; plate 58), *Garden in St. Germain*, the *European Quarter of Tunis* (*Garten in der tunesischen Europäer Kolonie St. Germain*)—all of which display an almost Cézanne-like technique²⁷—or *In the Kairouan Style* (im Stil v. Kairouan) with its more marked geometrism.

Let us return to Klee’s theoretical writings—and in particular to the Bauhaus course (Walter Gropius invited Klee to teach, beginning in 1921, in Weimar and then in Dessau). Having named the three characters—the linear, the tonal, and the chromatic—and having established the terrestrial as the domain of the massive, it becomes necessary for Klee to interrogate what he calls the “intermediary milieu” of air and water. This interrogation of intermediary milieu allows him to distinguish quite pertinently between “rigid rhythms” and “unbounded rhythms.” Rigid rhythms, such as a man climbing a staircase, a falling stone bouncing down an incline, and unbounded rhythms, such as a rising balloon, a meteor.

Thus pictorial “composition,” which is to hold together construction and phenomenon, is itself the combination of rigid and unbounded rhythms. This is how, what Klee calls a “superior polyphony” is formed, and it is how the painting becomes a “superior organism,” a “synthesis of dissemblances”²⁸ and an “organization of multiplicity in a unity.”²⁹

But what does this mean? It will suffice for us to continue the investigation of movement. Klee picks up the analysis of the

20 Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst*, 17–19.

21 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #831.

22 Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst*, 45–47.

23 Klee, “Wege des Naturstudiums,” 126.

24 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L’œil et l’esprit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), 69.

25 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #907.

26 *Ibid.*, #926o.

27 Klee’s admiration for Cézanne should be noted. In 1909, Klee calls him “the master par excellence” (*ibid.*, #857). He had visited the Paris Cézanne exposition in 1907.

28 Klee, “Bauhaus Vorlesungen, Wiederholung” [May 15, 1922], 142.

29 Klee, “Bauhaus Vorlesungen, Rückblick” [July 3, 1922], 150.

pendulum where he had left off: "Let us free the pendulum from weight." In giving to it a strong impetus, the pendulum is put into a continual circular motion until it is stopped. It thus logically describes a never-ending circle. The circle is "the purest of dynamical forms."³⁰

Circular movement—the purest of movements—free us from pendulum movement and from the earth that dominated the theory of lines and of surfaces.³¹ With circular movement (for example that of a spinning top when it encounters no obstacle or resistance, or that of the spiral) we penetrate into the "cosmic," infinite, movement freed from terrestrial weight. On the contrary, terrestrial movements are finite movements with a beginning and an end. The analyses of the circle and of its theoretically infinite rotation also introduce us to the superb analyses of color that occupy two of the last Bauhaus courses (numbers ten and eleven, those from November 28 and December, 12, 1922). Here, Klee elaborates what he calls a "topography of color" in accordance with the work of Chevreuil, Goethe's *Farbenlehre*, and Otto Runge's color-circle. He refers, also, to Delacroix and to Cézanne as well as to research by his Bauhaus contemporaries Kandinsky and Johannes Itten, and by Delaunay. The "topography of color" finds its specific place in connection with the chromatic circle. Thus, he writes in course number ten:

We free the pendulum of weight, let it loose so that it might enter...into the domain of perfect rotation and of complete movement within the symbol of the circle where pure colors are truly at home.³²

Why are pure colors at home in the symbol of the circle? Klee explicates the chromatic circle in the manner of his aforementioned predecessors. He places, as they do, the primary colors (yellow, red, blue) at three points on the perimeter of the circle and does the same for the secondary colors (orange, purple, green)—each secondary color (composed of the two closest primary colors on the circle) is the complement of the primary color diametrically across from it. Here, two phenomena can be observed: first, the primary color and its complement are reciprocally engendered in the eye, and second, that there is "gray" between two colors—this gray will be the center of the circle. All this is well known, and as Klee knew, the same relation can be established with the diameters of the circle as well as with the perimeter.

It is noteworthy, and particularly important to Klee, that with "peripheral" movement, colors are themselves in an infinite and continuous movement—which is to say that they acquire the determination "cosmic." This is why the rainbow is an insufficient representation of color: on the one hand a rainbow is only a semi-circle, and on the other hand, it juxtaposes colors instead

of circulating them on the periphery of a circle—briefly put, the rainbow lacks the aspect of time.

Course number eleven pursues the investigation by posing a question that, by now, has become essential. For, as Klee says, the question is not "what is red?" (or "what is blue?" etc.). The question the painter refuses here is the question in search of a definition, the question in search of an object, an essence or a substance. The question is much more the following: "What is it that red does not signify? Where does its activity end? What is its reach?"³³

The difference between the two kinds of question is particularly important because the second question—the one that is to be posed—is not at all one of definition, object, substance, or essence. It is, rather, a question in search of the phenomenon "red," of red as appearing. How far does it go? Where does it end? This is the question of the appearing of color. Thus, in pointing the relation between appearing and color is affirmed as we have already seen.

One might ask how Klee justifies this displacement of the traditional "what is it?" question in favor of the question concerning appearing. It will be useful to return to the chromatic circle, in which what red does not signify is green, the complement, for red and green cancel each other out (let us note that mixing red and green gives gray). The active range of red is equivalent to two-thirds of the circumference, with a culminating red point, an extreme "hot" red (yellowish red) and an extreme "cold red" (bluish red). The other third, from which red is totally absent, is opposite the high point of red and is its complement: green—where red is no longer active, where it no longer appears. Klee has thus responded to the question he posed: "what does red not signify, where does it end, what are its limits?" Its limits consist in the two-thirds of the periphery of the circle extending in both directions from the culminating red point. The same goes for each of the other primary colors, blue and yellow.

Thus the active chromatic range of each color occupies two-thirds of the periphery of the chromatic circle. Whence we derive the following two laws: on the one hand, every primary color's culminating point is free of the influence of the other two culminating points; on the other hand, each color's range of influence occupies two thirds of the periphery of the circle. Hence, two primary colors slide, so to speak, overlap and intrude upon each other while weakening in this work of overlapping and intruding. And thus at the same time that one color begins, the neighboring color has already begun on the circle: it flows for a span of time between the two "appearings" of both colors—and this is, properly speaking, the rule of polyphony. As Klee explains:

Each color begins from its nothingness, which is the neighboring summit (the culminating point of the neighboring color), at first weakly, and rises to its own summit from which it descends again in order to disappear into its nothingness which is the other neighboring

30 Klee, "Pädagogische Skizze, Skizze einer Farbenlehre," in *Das bildnerische Denken*, 467–511, and "Bauhaus Vorlesungen 10–11" [Nov. 28, Dec. 5, Dec. 19, 1922], 150ff.

31 Klee, "Bauhaus Vorlesungen 8" [Mar. 20, 1922], 119.

32 Klee, "Bauhaus Vorlesungen 10" [Nov. 28, 1922], 156.

33 Klee, "Bauhaus Vorlesungen 11" [Dec. 19, 1922], 173.

summit.... Colors do not resonate on the circle in a single voice, but rather in a sort of three voiced song. They raise their voices one after the other, as in a canon. At each of the three principal points, one voice culminates, another voice gradually approaches, and a third voice expires.... One might call this new figure the canon of totality.³⁴

Have we not, here, come upon the concept of "pictorial polyphony"? Indeed, and it is constructed exactly on the model of musical polyphony. In the latter, there is not a juxtaposition of voices, but rather a superposition—each voice begins with a certain temporal gap or temporal delay relative to the preceding voice. Pictorial polyphony, as described here for the primary colors, is a polyphony in three movements.

If circular representation signifies return and repetition, then the succession of colors on the circle—this form of color continuity made of slidings and intrudings—is of a type wholly other than linear or surface continuity. Indeed this chromatic continuity is composed of (dis)continuities (for when a primary color meets another primary color a void of color emerges—grayness). Chromatic (dis)continuity thus admits leaps. Klee expresses this magnificently in writing that with linear and spatial continuity, the eye is like an animal that grazes and feeds, moving gradually, whereas in chromatic (dis)continuity, the eye is like a predatory animal, leaping and jumping.³⁵

With the metaphor of polyphony, therefore, we leave behind the domains of linearity and of weight, the domain that Klee calls the "terrestrial," and we enter into the domain of the "cosmic." At this point, one must note that Klee had already expressed this difference of the terrestrial and the cosmic long ago—notably in his *Diaries*, after reporting the death of Franz Marc at Verdun, March 4, 1916:

From the moment I say who Franz Marc is, I must say who I am, for much of that in which I participate belongs equally to him. With Marc, the thinking of the terrestrial primes the thinking of the cosmos.... The Faustian tendency in him.... Often in these last days, the fear arose in me that one day he would be opposed to me.... My ardor is more of the order of the dead and of beings unborn. The passionate manner of the human is undoubtedly missing in my art. I do not love animals and the totality of beings with a terrestrial heart. Rather, I submerge myself at first in totality. The terrestrial, for me, cedes place to the thinking of the cosmic. My love is distant and religious.³⁶

A few lines later he adds, most excellently: "The human in my work does not represent the species but a cosmic point."³⁷

We shall see how, from 1915–16 until the end of his life, Klee realizes this in painting.

GENESIS AND RHYTHM

In the seventh Bauhaus course, Klee writes:

From a cosmic point of view, if there is a given as such, it is movement, and as infinite force it does not need a particular energetic impulse. The tranquility of things on the terrestrial sphere is what materially slows the given movement. To take this earthly affiliation as a norm is mistaken. The history of the work is primarily genesis.³⁸

And in the July 3, 1922 "Course Retrospective" he says:

Any work is not, from the outset, a product, not something which is: the work is in the first instance genesis, a work that becomes. No work is pre-determined: on the contrary, each work begins somewhere in the motif and accumulates "organs" from that point, in order to become an organism.³⁹

This is something that will be repeated many times, like a leitmotif, notably in *Das bildnerische Denken*: "Genesis as formal movement constitutes what is essential in the work.... Thinking thus less of form (still life) than of formation."⁴⁰

The opposition is thus one between form (*Gestalt*), which is like still life, and formation (*Gestaltung*), which is living, in movement (*metabole*). Expressed otherwise, it is the opposition between *natura naturata* and *natura naturans*. "On Modern Art" is particularly explicit in this regard:

Natura naturans brings more (to the artist) than *natura naturata*...his glance plunges deeper and his horizon is enlarged from the present to the past.... Instead of a finished image of nature, an image—the only one that matters—of creation as genesis imposes itself upon him.⁴¹

What is meant by "Genesis"? Genesis signifies engendering, gestation, and becoming. Genesis implies sperm, egg, originary cell. Plants, animals and humans are so engendered. From thence, an organism is formed. But what is an organism? An organism is a whole, from which one cannot withdraw a part

37 Ibid.

38 Klee, "Bauhaus Vorlesungen 7" [Feb. 27, 1922], 95.

39 Klee, "Bauhaus Vorlesungen, Rückblick" [July 3, 1922], 149.

40 Klee, "Philosophie der Gestaltung," in *Das bildnerische Denken*, 449ff.

41 Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst*, 41.

34 Ibid., 176–77.

35 Klee, "Bauhaus Vorlesungen 7" [Feb. 27, 1922], 99.

36 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #1008; "Bauhaus Vorlesungen 9" [Apr. 3, 1922], 127.

without destroying the former; it is a whole that is the articulation of different organs, a whole articulated according to the originary germ, the originary egg. It is from there that one must set out if one is to grasp the living organism. It is necessary, therefore, to return to the “matrix” from which genesis is elaborated and from which the organism unfolds. This is why the painter does not paint the completed organism, the completed model. Rather, he must retrace the paths and movements of genesis, which is why Klee affirms, in “On Modern Art” the famous phrase: “To go back from the model to the matrix.”⁴²

This is illustrated at the beginning of the lecture by the parable of the tree: “It would never occur to someone to demand of a tree that it form its branches on the model of its roots. Everyone agrees that the high cannot be a simple reflection of the low. It is obvious that to different functions, carried out in different orders, must correspond major dissemblance.”⁴³

Genesis is unceasing in the work, as it is in the living organism. It should be recalled that the painting has been described as a higher organism. An organism, whether natural or superior, is a living composition of differences, of differences that are articulated in the whole, differences that live together in the same time. Thus, it is the simultaneity of differences that constitutes the whole of the organism. This is also what distinguishes an *organism* from a numerical series: the organism is an individual (it is indivisible), whereas the numerical series is divisible and thus repeatable, an opposition that Klee describes, in the fourth Bauhaus course, as the opposition between the “individual” and the “dividual.”⁴⁴ It is this unceasing genesis that the painter paints and it is this unceasing genesis that the spectator’s eye must see. This return to the matrix, this sight of the unceasing genesis of the painting is no easy task for the spectator: his eye—his “optical eye”—is not habituated to it and often he sees “nothing” there, that is to say nothing other than the represented object or the anecdote conveyed in painting. No doubt, only the eye that we have named “musical eye” or “pictorial eye” can accomplish this task. As Eric Alliez says elegantly of Cézanne: “The concentric eye of the painter, sliding in between the leaves of matter, is already no longer the eye of Cézanne as a person.”⁴⁵

A painting is genesis, that is to say movement. It is an indivisible whole, thus “individual.” How does the “musical eye” of the painter and of the spectator traverse this “individual”? What does it create and what does it traverse? It creates and traverses the painting *rhythmically*—although, incidentally, it does not always traverse the painting in the same way whenever it looks.

Once again, what is rhythm? Rhythm is an “arch-sensibility,” beneath the objective forms of space and time. As Henri Maldiney writes: “rhythm is not gnoseological, it is pathic.” It is not knowledge but existence, which is to say *ek-sistence*. It is not a mode of representation that the painter or the spectator could objectively adopt but a mode of “presence” to things and to one-

self. For Klee, rhythm is that through which the work *ek-sists*; that is why Klee does not attempt to transcribe music directly into painting but rather to create rhythms proper to painting. Thus, to speak as we have of a “musical eye” is not entirely satisfying, it would be better to speak of a “rhythmic eye.”

A pathic moment without particular pathos, between “feeling” and “moving”; such is the rhythmic moment. An energetic moment where the issue is one of a “combination of forces,” tensions, and what Kant quite justly calls “intensive magnitudes.” If the painting, like any higher organism, is a “synthesis of dissemblances,”⁴⁶ if drawing and painting are an “organizing of multiplicity into a unity,”⁴⁷ if to look at a painting is to see particular configurations of movement, and if, as Pierre Sauvanet says, rhythm is “a periodic structure of movement,”⁴⁸ then without doubt the movement at issue in rhythm is under no condition a displacement within the painting’s space, but rather a transformation, not a *kinesis* but a *metabole*, that is to say a movement that carries with it “change,” “alteration” (*alloiosis*), a becoming-other, or a different becoming. Rhythm coincides with structuration, an active structuration that puts the work to work—a structuration which is “at work” and which “works” in the tableau; rhythm is a field of tensions.

This is to say that the different “parts” of the painting (if one still wants to speak in this way, although there are no parts separable from the whole), its different elements form a whole in the process of formation, reformation, and configuration before our eyes, and yet we cannot determine their starting and end-points. Of course, the “pictorial eye” can begin where it wants: this is because the succession in ordinary vision gives way to a simultaneity of rhythmic totality.⁴⁹ Let us recall the formulation we have already cited—we had purposely left off the ending:

Polyphonic painting is superior to music, to the extent that the temporal element is here replaced by the spatial element. The notion of simultaneity appears here in an ever richer form.... Seeking to place the accent on temporality, along the lines of a plastic fugue, Delaunay chooses a format of a length impossible to grasp in a single glance.⁵⁰

We know, also, that Klee was particularly interested in both the works and the research of Delaunay and simultaneism.⁵¹

This means that the spatial in painting is temporal and that the temporal is spatial, thanks to this superposition of the sequential and the simultaneous that rhythm realizes: rhythm is this implica-

42 Ibid., 47.

43 Ibid., 13.

44 Klee, “Bauhaus Vorlesungen 4” [Jan. 16, 1922], 46–47.

45 Eric Alliez and Jean-Clet Martin, *L’œil-cerveau: Nouvelles histoires de la peinture moderne* (Paris: Vrin, 2007), 457.

46 Klee, “Bauhaus Vorlesungen, Wiederholung” [May 15, 1922], 142.

47 Klee, “Bauhaus Vorlesungen, Rückblick” [July 3, 1922], 150.

48 Pierre Sauvanet, *Le rythme et la raison 2: Rhythm analyses* (Paris: Kimé, 2000), 17–35. See the author’s perfect analysis of Klee’s painting entitled *Rhythmical (Rhyth-misches)* [1930] where the author shows how a simple chessboard is transformed into a veritable construction.

49 Klee, *Über die moderne Kunst*, 17.

50 Klee, *Tagebücher*, #1081.

51 See Henri Maldiney’s superb analyses of abstract painting in *Ouvrir le rien—l’art nu* (La Versanne: Encre Marine, 2011). Regarding Delaunay, see 205–221.



Fig. 1: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Moonrise over St. Germain (Mondaufgang [St. Germain])*, 1915/242. Watercolor and pencil on paper on cardboard, 18.4 x 17.2 cm, Museum Folkwang Essen, Inv. C 2/58.

tion of space in time. Is then rhythm not what we had already encountered in terms of equilibrium, “an equilibrium which is not symmetry”? Is this rhythmic equilibrium not the fundamental determination of abstraction in painting? Is it not this equilibrium (which is not symmetry) that Klee calls “harmony”?

This implies the three criteria of rhythm that Sauvanet has emphasized: *structure*, *periodicity*, and *movement*. Here we must note the following: *Structure* is not series. For series is “dividual,” or divisible (for example a numerical series), whereas structure is “individual,” indivisible like an organism. *Periodicity*, that is reiteration or repetition, is not identity, for repetition is transformation. *Movement* is a field of tensions and the definitional core of rhythm.

Rilke (a friend of Klee) wrote in a similar vein to his wife, after having visited the Paris Salon in 1907 dedicated to Cézanne:

The Salon closes today. And already...the grand color-architecture of the *Woman on red sofa* turns out to be as difficult to memorize as a long decimal. And yet I was overcome by it, figure by figure. It is as if every point of the picture were conscious of every other one. Inasmuch as each one participates, each combines in it adaptation and refusal; each keeps watch over and protects the equilibrium in its own way. So much so that, in the final analysis, the entire painting poses a counterweight to reality.... It becomes, therefore, an issue of colors and their interrelations, each one concentrating, affirming itself in the face

of the other and finding there its plenitude. Just as different juices are formed together in the mouth of a dog.... In this give and take of a thousand reciprocal influences, the interior of the painting vibrates, hovers in itself, without a single immobile point.⁵²

“In rhythm”: this means that a painting is neither a document nor a reproduction of an object: “A painting which has a nude man as its subject does not represent the structure of human anatomy, but that of the painting itself.”⁵³

And once again this means that a painting does not present a state, but rather a process and that it is not made of parts, but instead, of “resonances/dissonances.” It is the appearing of a field of tensions.

THE EXPERIENCE OF PICTORIAL RHYTHM

We shall now experience rhythm in a few paintings by Klee, through the three implied components *structure*, *periodicity*, and *movement*.⁵⁴

Among the watercolors from 1914–15, which emerge from Klee’s trip to Tunisia, we shall analyze *Moonrise over St. Germain (Mondaufgang [St. Germain])* (1915; fig. 1).

Structure: a layout composed of large, rectangular masoned blocks of somewhat imprecise contours (the fluidity of watercolor) and of various colors: blue, yellow, red, green, brown, black, and white. Pale colors, as if washed out, bleached no doubt by the shining white of the full moon, round, above the blocks. From the “geometrisism” of the form of the blocks one senses that Klee is drawing close to what he calls the cubist reduction: a reduction to simple geometrical forms.

Periodicity: arising from the shifts in colors and from the multiplicity of blocks, distributed from left to right (or from right to left, according to the direction of the gaze) and from bottom to top. The blocks are juxtaposed and yet embedded or slightly superimposed upon each other, some passing in front or behind other ones. This color shift, together with the passing of the blocks in front of or behind one another, produces a clear structural rhythm.

Movement: Doubled in the gaze: on the one hand, the structural rhythm of colors and of juxtapositions and differences between blocks, on the other hand, a more unbounded rhythm of attraction directed upward, as if the blocks were drawn toward the moon above and as if, simultaneously, the latter emerged from the former. A slow rising of the moon above the blocks appears as the slow rising of the blocks toward the moon. In this watercolor, it seems also that the lines of construction and the lines of force not only co-habitate but also superimpose themselves on one another and are identical. Another movement, another advent of rhythm emerges when we look upon the dark

⁵² Rilke to Carla Rilke, Oct. 22, 1907 in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Briefe über Cézanne* (Frankfurt: Insel, 1981).

⁵³ Klee, *Tagebücher*, #840.

⁵⁴ We are here following Sauvanet’s analytical schema.

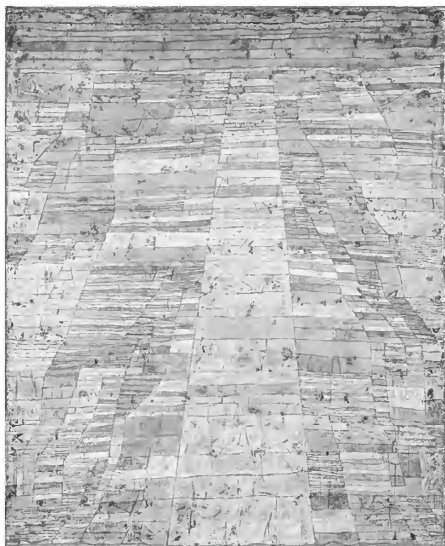


Fig. 2: Paul Klee, *Highway and Byways (Hauptweg und Nebenwege)*, 1929/90. Oil on canvas, 183.7 x 67.5 cm, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Inv. ML 76/3235.

blocks (black or brown) on the left, beneath the moon, forming, like the blades of a propeller on the verge of starting to turn in an imperceptible wind, a rhythm—muted, imminent.

Other paintings from 1917–23 are closer to the cubist phenomenon of “reduction.” Thus the painting of 1923 entitled *Harmony of Quadrilaterals in Red, Yellow, Blue, White, and Black (Harmonie aus Vierecken mit rot gelb blau weiss und schwarz)* composed of squares and rectangles of unequal dimensions and primary colors, amongst which are inserted black and white squares, also of unequal dimensions. These quadrilaterals, unequal and in no distinguishable order, induce the slightest shift, a trembling beneath the gaze. The inequality of the structures, the dissymmetry of colors and placement engenders a movement of pulsation that constitutes the rhythm of the painting. The picture does not represent any story, any anecdote, and this is, precisely, abstraction.

In 1929, with the painting entitled *Highway and Byways (Hauptweg und Nebenwege)* (1929; fig. 2), a more startling reduction and a more complex rhythm emerges in a multitude of nuances of pale and non-uniform colors.

Structure: Vertical strips and horizontal strata. The vertical strips are entirely populated by the horizontal strata, which fill the painting. The vertical band situated almost at the center of the painting (slightly shifted over to the right), the only one to be perfectly rectilinear, appears very rigid, stable and immobile. This central vertical band recedes from us, toward the top, or into the depth, as do the lateral bands (lateral paths). All of the vertical

bands, those that are central as well as the lateral ones, produce an effect of perspectival distance insofar as they narrow while receding from us, and the strata composing them shrink in width and breadth as they grow distant, producing a true perspectival effect. But is this an effect of depth-perspective or of height-perspective as Klee had carefully analyzed it in the Bauhaus lectures when he attempted to describe the look of a tall building from the bottom? Lifting our eyes, we are beset with vertigo. Thus one can say that the bands and the strata draw us toward a gulf, as toward a vanishing point, but a gulf of *height*, and the “principal path” leads us away as on a steep and difficult staircase that takes our breath away. Breathless, vertiginous—the inverse of rhythm.

Periodicity: The strata that fill up both sides of the vertiginous central strip, as they do its interior, constitute a complex periodicity, as one can determine neither their law nor their calculable logic.

Movement: In addition to the perspectival diminution and the vertigo of the gaze from bottom to top, there are other movements. In fact, can one not see that the rigid and solid central vertical strip (the main path) induces numerous movements to which the lateral bands, and all those on both sides of the central band are subjected? It seems that, by its mass and rigidity, it prevents all the other bands and strata from occupying the territory that they would need, pushing them back. Hence what is induced is what Klee calls a “combat of lines” among the bands. Due to the action of the central vertical band, the lateral bands and the horizontal strata constrict and press up against each other, producing an unceasing disequilibrium that makes each contort, resisting the other, defending themselves, circumventing and sometimes destroying one another. A *combat of lines*: shock and counter-shock, contortions of avoidance, compressions and contractions. Geological buckling or the folding of a fan, condemned to unfold and re-fold itself endlessly. Some of these movements seem to efface the strata, to reduce others, and make others appear, as if the multiplicity of strata, under the domination of the central strip, had to reconfigure itself incessantly in order to continue to exist, as if an initial juxtaposition and succession, a sort of pre-history of the painting, anterior to the painting, as its past, were to transform itself into simultaneity, becoming visible in the present of the picture. A history of the painting becomes legible: a disequilibrium seems to reign constantly, whilst being never the same: a disequilibrium that never stabilizes, an unstable equilibrium/disequilibrium. A *combat of lines*: momentary non-symmetrical equilibrium, asymmetrical balance, a vertiginous and rhythmic equilibrium/disequilibrium. Forces of resistance, forces of invasion, forces of disappearance confront one another, folding and re-folding in a field of tensions.

At the top and bottom of the painting, long blue horizontal strata support the entirety of the picture—three above, one below, surround the painting like a rail, containing the strata and bands, and prevent them, perhaps, from spreading beyond the painting.

Two other paintings from the same period, *Monument in Fertile Country (Monument im Fruchland)* (1929) and *Individualized Measurement of Strata (individualisierte Höhenmessung der*

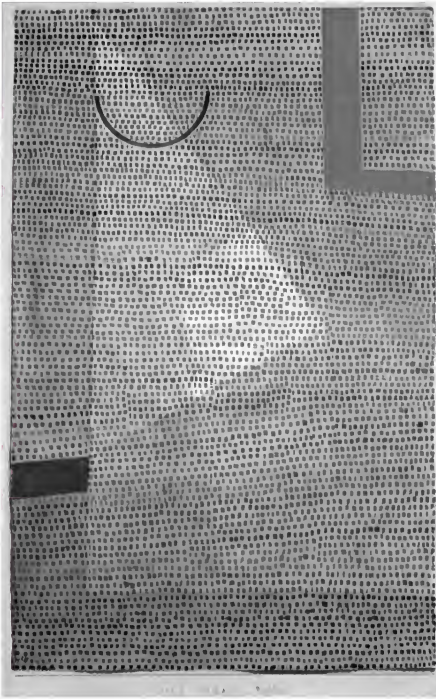


Fig. 3: Paul Klee, *Semi-circle with Angular Features (Halbkreis mit Winkeligen Merkmalen)*, 1932/5. Watercolor and gouache on paper on cardboard, 48 x 30 cm, Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf, Inv. Nr. 28.

Lagen) (1930), evidence comparable techniques. In these two paintings, though, the strata and vertically and horizontally stratified constructions (also of unequal dimensions, but in livelier and more contrasting colors) are dominated by a strict, regulated geometricality. It is in the inequality of the segments and of the colors that movement is born—a slow movement, as if the painting were slowly to turn around upon itself. In *Monument in Fertile Country*, where yellow is dominant, it is the large central trapezoid, made of multiple colored strips, that seems to put the whole into rotation. In *Individualized Measurement of Strata*, a similar rotation is initiated by the red square, like a decentered center. A rhythm of folding is wedged to a rhythm of rotation, which begins either from the trapezoid or the square.

In 1932 the reduction proceeds in a completely different manner. Consider the painting entitled *Semi-circle with Angular Features (Halbkreis mit Winkeligen Merkmalen)* (fig. 3).

Structure: A multiplicity of regular points, of red or black tonalities, aligned from left to right (or from right to left, according to the direction of the gaze) constitute the totality of the painting. Is this, as some critics have suggested, a pointillist or divisionist tech-

nique? Is it not, rather, a technique comparable to that of mosaic tessellation, a technique of riddling?⁵⁵ Additionally, in the corner of the frame, above and to the right—more precisely a uniform un-riddled red angle appears, as if it were another painting entering into this one. On the three other sides, the painting is framed by large riddled bands dominated by black points, and on the left side, a cut made by a black un-riddled band. Above and to the left, a semi-circle in a thin black line.

Periodicity: The structural rhythm is provided by this repetition of innumerable black and red points, by this tessellation comparable to a long hail storm—or like a visual *ritornello*, creating a constant discontinuity, in which the multiplicity of points would be like a return to the unique point of initiation. Is this riddling with points and small regular tessellations not exactly what Klee describes as the exit out of chaos, from the initial gray point? A *ritornello* of the origin?

Movement: Many rhythmic movements are interwoven here. On the one hand, the movement of riddling: it seems to cover the surface of the canvas, but also to “discover” it: it discovers the painting in its beginning to exist from out of the primal chaos, making manifest the very essence of painting. What is painted is the very act and gesture of the painter: covering and uncovering. It is both movements at once: covering and uncovering, the essential function of painting—already an elementary pictorial rhythm. What is more, if the painting is almost entirely riddled, filled almost entirely by these minuscule tessellations, the distribution of colors imposes yet another rhythm onto the structural rhythm of riddling. For the lateral band on the left and the two horizontal bands above and below are riddled more clearly and more extensively by black than by red points. The red points occupy more of the interior of the painting than the framing strips. Furthermore, a triangle of bleached tessellations, or rather tessellations in the process of being bleached out, is inscribed in the left-hand third and up until the center of the canvas: is this not also, in some way, the appearance of a white chaos, with which with the surroundings, more black than red, contrast: appearance or disappearance?

The entire painting vibrates in itself, giving out luminous waves, like endless visual “vocalizations”—the gaze, struck endlessly—free, as Klee wrote, to begin looking wherever it wishes. The gaze is “contained” by the frame, but not constrained by it. An intensive palpitation of colors. No representation, no anecdote here, just the reduction to pure abstraction. The painting does not narrate any history beyond the temporality of painting and its implementation: what covers the painting dis-covers it as painting.

The same year, 1932, other paintings put to work techniques of riddling and small regular tessellation, such as the famous *Ad Parnassum*, but also *Boy in Fancy Dress (Costümierter Knabe)*, in which the motif (the child) seems taken by surprise by the tessellations that cover him.

In 1937, the reduction is carried out in still another form, that of an extreme schematization. Such is the picture entitled *Area of*

55 It is well known that Klee saw and admired the mosaics of the Lateran Church in Rome and those in Ravenna during his almost six-month stay in Italy in 1902.



Fig. 4: Paul Klee, *Area of High Spirits (Gelände zu Übermutes)*, 1937/78. Charcoal and sanguine on cotton on mount, 43 x 26 cm, sold at Christie's June 21, 2011.

High Spirits (Gelände des Übermutes) (fig. 4)

Structure: The gaze is first of all struck by a sinuous form and hemmed in by a large, clearly visible black dash—a river-like meandering with multiple branches, rising from the bottom to the top of the canvas, where it opens like an estuary. Or rather, like a labyrinth made of detached and fluid spirals and loops with no rectilinear geometrical constructions. The only thing visible is the sinuousness, the looping, spiral construction, in addition to the play of an unbounded and fluid rhythm.

Periodicity: At the heart of this supple structure, the gaze is aroused by the sight of a multitude of extremely schematized figures traversing the picture. It is as if it is populated (or invaded) by multiple small stick-like figures, like people made from two thin strokes: two legs that end in two feet that stand flat on the ground; a vertical torso, always stick-like; often two stick-like arms, either horizontal or pointing with their hands upward or downward; finally, a round head endowed with a single eye. The legs and the arms seem to be animated by an irresistible movement.

Movement: The figures walk, run, or dance. Their legs are spread apart for walking, running, or dancing. The two legs rest on the ground in each case, but every time differently: where one

places its heel on the ground, another lifts the tip away from the ground. It is as if they were animated by a striding motion. Better yet, the arms stretch out horizontally, the hands pointing upward or downward—like the balancing of a tightrope walker (something Klee both painted and described in his Bauhaus courses). Some figures appear to skate, others to dance, turning around rapidly—all seem more or less to lift themselves above the ground. Some have seen here what commentators have observed in the Egyptian hieroglyphs of the kind that Klee had seen during his recent trip to Egypt. What seems more important to us, however, is that the reduction of these very small figures that one seems to see from afar or from above, preserves *only the form of the gesture and of the simple action: walking, running, or dancing.*

Of the figure as figure nothing appears. All anecdote is absent, all figurative particularity pushed aside; there remains nothing but the simple gesture of walking, of running, or of dancing, in its simple appearing—like a pure diagram of movement. A gesture, seemingly threatened by a vacillation or a tottering that is controlled by the equilibrium of the walker, runner, or dancer, an incessant conquest and re-conquest of that equilibrium, the “non-symmetrical equilibrium”—which is to say a rhythm. The endless agitation of these figures emerges in a succession/simultaneity that comprises a coordinated movement, inside and outside the supple and unbounded contortions of the picture. Another question emerges still: *are these figures a multiplicity of different figures or one sole figure deployed in different moments of walking, running, or dancing?* Are there multiple figures, or rather one single figure that evolves in time? Expressed otherwise: between multiplicity and unity, between continuity and discontinuity, the rhythm of walking, running, or dancing is played out here—or rather the movement in its succession is translated into simultaneity on the canvas. Or again: the space of the picture is temporal, its time is spatial. Space implies time, time implies space: this is rhythm. Did Klee not write that simultaneity translates pictorial polyphony better than succession in musical polyphony?

From 1938 to 1940, other paintings, such as *Handbill for Comedians (Werbeblatt der Komiker)*, *Flora on the Rocks (Flora am Felsen)*, or the superb *Kettledrummer (Paukenspieler)* now produce a reduction “to rhythm” of an extreme intensity and density.

The “reduction” for Klee, then, is not only a reduction to more primitive geometrical forms such as the triangle, rectangle, and circle, nor is it just the multiplication of “profiles” of figures or of things. The most important reduction for Klee occurs in the suppression of any kind of anecdotal form, or any representation: a reduction to gesture and to the unfolding of an action—a reduction to movement that allows nothing but movement itself to appear. A reduction where movement appears in its purest pictorial reality, that of a transformation of succession into simultaneity—a reduction to rhythm, and consequently to abstraction; something that is at work in all painting, where the gaze does not see the thing as an object but rather as the trajectory and movement of appearing.

RHYTHM ONCE MORE: DRAWINGS AND ETCHINGS

Klee's numerous drawings, in pencil, pen, or chalk, must be classified in the category of "tonality," as he himself has defined it: the "black and white," the chiaroscuro.

This dual tonality constitutes in itself a rhythm: a first, primitive rhythm, upon which is superimposed another, equally primitive rhythm elaborated by lines, namely the rhythm of continuity and discontinuity. These two modalities—black and white, continuous and discontinuous—are undoubtedly the very origin of rhythm, its emergence, not for the "optical eye" but for the "musical" or "pictorial" eye—that eye which we have referred to as the "rhythmic eye."

Rhythm, in Klee's drawings and etchings, is developed in several different ways: "structural rhythms," "unbounded rhythms," "continuous rhythms," as explicated in the Bauhaus courses.

STRUCTURAL RHYTHMS

Tightrope Walker (Seiltänzer) (1923; plate 20), is undoubtedly the prototype for the collection of drawings and etchings that belong to the 1920s: a complex construction of lines composing horizontality and verticality, an asymmetric equilibrium where an unexpected object is multiplied: *the ladder*. A mark of ascent, but also of possible fall, the ladder is both the formative element and the motor of these drawings, for it is a matter not of a scene of represented objects, but of an event. An ascent, a walk across a tightrope, a possible fall: the lines here are what Klee calls "acts of mobility," of energies, that originate from a vanishing point that cannot be localized within the painting itself. The repetition and multiplication of lines, as "acts of mobility," constitute the rhythm of the work, which is nothing other than the implication of space and time, in verticality and horizontality.

This "combat of lines" with (and contrary to) gravity, becomes apparent in the drawings *Entertainer in April (Gaukler im April)* (1928; plate 22) and *From Gliding to Rising (von Gleiten zu Steigen)* (1923; plate 18), which is composed of multiple directional arrows such as can be found similarly in other paintings. Equally typical is a drawing from 1915, *Death for the Idea (Der Tod für die Idee)* (plate 61), where it is collapse and dissolution toward the depths that impose themselves, and not an ascent toward a height.

FLUID AND UNBOUNDED RHYTHMS

With *Geometric Spiral (geometrische Spirale)* (1927; plate 27) we arrive at fluid and unbounded rhythms. The spiral is composed of vertical bands colored red, yellow, and blue, and outside of the spiral, a directional arrow indicates the point toward which the bands converge, narrowed in the extreme toward the point which is at the same time the re-emergence of the movement of the spiral. On the other side of the arrow and spiral a large circular blue point appears to indicate both a projection of the point of origin, and the endlessness of the movement that transforms the spiral into circular motion. The spiral is thus not static, it turns and returns upon

itself, and its mobility—in theory infinite—is its rhythm—a fluid rhythm, without fits and starts, emerging from out of itself and returning thence ceaselessly. In the Bauhaus courses as we have seen, the spiral is an infinite movement, like the circle.

The movement of the spiral is visible equally in the pen drawing *Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying (geht kaum mehr, fliegt noch nicht)* (plate 15) also from 1927. The simple and fluid outline of a walking man, accompanied at eye-level and shoulder-height by a twisting of soft lines resembling wings in movement, and producing a kind of visual vertigo. Between walking and flying, between rhythm and vertigo.

Still other fluid and unbound rhythms: the pencil or chalk drawings from 1933 such as *Accusation in the Street (Anklage auf der Strasse)*, *Manhunt (Menschenjagd)*, *Violence (Gewalt)*, *Barbarian Mercenary (Barbaren-Söldner)*, and *Emigrating (auswandern)* (plates 47, 49, 46, 51, 54). Here, the rhythm of black and white tonality results in a multiplicity of features that makes up each individual figure. Each figure, distinct in the space of the drawing, is, nonetheless, filled with lines that are tangled up in one another, undulating and floating, spinning or spiraling. The density, the entanglement and involvement of the lines in each figure precisely produce what one might call a "panic rhythm": that of Germany in 1933 and Hitler's rise to power.

"Panic of lines," panic rhythm: the palpitations, vibrations, twitches and convulsions of bodies, wracked with trembling; wounded, menacing or menaced, terrorized. Bodies whose limbs are in disharmony: sometimes a frontal view whose face is nonetheless in profile, haggard, turned away from the body in terror. We "see" these bodies shake.

Horror or sadness show themselves in speed or in slowness: the speed of pursuit, a desperate flight—or else the kind of slow departure, heavy and melancholic, that confers a quasi-immobility onto the drawing *Emigrating*; a sort of movement without displacement, almost "on the spot," an infinite exhaustion. In such breathless, unbound rhythms, the entire, each time, vibrates.

Such is the rhythm of the figures from 1933: an unbound but desperate rhythm, a field of extreme tensions, not only a "combat of lines," but also a field of figural confrontations, a field of tremblings, a "whirling," a vertigo "made visible" by pencil, pen or chalk, to the "musical" eye, the pictorial eye: to the rhythmic eye.

THE RHYTHM OF GENESIS AND THE GENESIS OF RHYTHM: THE SINGLE PENCIL STROKE

The drawings from the last years of Klee's life (1939–40), display a notable specificity, most typically in the magnificent drawings from the series *Angels*, of the same period. To these we can apply a formula drawn from ancient Chinese painting: "the work is born of a single stroke of the brush."

Indeed, Klee's drawing is now made of a simple stroke, a precise, unblurred line, producing figures and forms that are extremely simplified and often deformed. Formation and deformation: we have the impression of a single continuous line that produces a figure composed of differentiated and dissimilar

parts that yet constitutes a whole that could have been produced almost without discontinuity, almost without lifting the pencil.

This quasi-continuity of the stroke or of the outline can be seen in almost all of the drawings from this period. Let us look closely at *Last Word in the Drama* (*letztes Wort im Drama*) from 1938 (plate 44). We see a figure: on the left side of the drawing, the line of the neck continues, without stopping, into an ear and into wavy hair, in an asymmetric spiral. There, on the forehead, we can make out a break in the line, a blank interval, and then the line begins again, moving on into a black eye, and without break, the arch of an eyebrow and a nose. Below the nose, a brief blank interval, then the line takes up again to form a mouth, followed without interruption by a chin and, to the right of the drawing, an ear. Again, a blank interval, and the line picks up again to form a loop and in a rounded and clear eye, in complete dissymmetry from the black eye on the left side. As our description has shown, there are, in this drawing, barely three moments at which the pencil line is interrupted, three moments of discontinuity in the line, in the single line of the drawing, three moments when the artist lifted the pencil. Apart from these three blank moments, the black line is continuous and, in these three blank moments, effects a "leap," initiates an interval in order to reinstate itself and continue. The figure is composed of a single and quasi-continuous stroke. Thus, the "leap" of the black line, the brief interruption, the "blank," is, in Klee's own formulation, not comparable to an animal grazing, step by step, but rather to the leap of the predatory animal—a leap that does not interfere with the continuity of the trajectory: the discontinuity is inscribed within the continuity and this is the rhythm of this drawing, of this "single pencil line."

The same singularity of line and the same quasi-continuity of the stroke can be found in almost all the drawings from the Zentrum Paul Klee in Bern, dating from 1939 to 1940. Such is the case with *Uneven Flight* (*unebene Flucht*) (1939; plate 14), which is more complex because here the angled lines are more numerous than the rounded ones, and in which a running figure is composed (or decomposed), legs widely stretched out and arms extending, one pointing upward and the other down, in rhythmic accord with the legs.

In *Superior Bird* (*höherer Vogel*) (1940; plate 16) the straight lines, tracing incomplete quadrilaterals, are dominant, but their tracing too is quasi-continuous.

In 1940 still, in *Eidola: Erstwhile Philosopher* (*ΕΙΔΩΛΑ: weiland Philosoph*) (plate 60) and *Flight* (*Flucht*) (plate 25) one finds the same quasi-continuous line, but in the first case in the figure at rest, in the second, a mad sprint. The same can be said for the pastel *Stick It Out!* (*durchhalten!*) from 1940 (plate 43), a figure almost entirely folded in upon itself, as if enveloped by itself. Looking at the magnificent ink drawing *No!* (*Nein!*) (1940; plate 42), we find a thin and precise line, quasi-continuous, and a figure almost immobile, but so concentrated upon itself in refusal, resistance, and opposition, by the firmness of its vertical stature and the extreme contraction of its fingers, that we are left with the impression of an unequalled force and energy.

How can we here gather together the characteristics of the drawings from 1939 to 1940 that we have listed so far?

First, the quasi-continuity of the outline. No longer is there a multiplicity of lines fleshing out the figures, as was the case in the drawings from 1933. There is just one single and unique line. A line that is interrupted, occasionally, in order to be reconstituted, to continue its path and to pursue its drawing. These brief blank intervals and resumptive of the line affirm the periodicity of a rhythm that stops and begins again. There is a "change" of the black line in its blank spaces. The continuity is in the changing.

This rhythmic outline composes the drawing into an "organism," an "individual arrangement"—which is to say it is indivisible. The drawing is itself an organism, a living, "natural" organism.

This "naturalness" is as Klee says "a new nature," for Klee does not depict the nature of man, but the "nature of the work." As he also says, painting a naked man is not a matter of painting the anatomy of the human species, but the anatomy of the painting or of the drawing.

But where does this continuously unfolding line begin? Where does it end? Where is the point from which it takes its departure, where is its originary germ? Our eye indeed searches for the point of emergence of the line or of the trace, but it does not find it. Or rather: it finds many possible points whence the line could have been born, but our eye cannot decide between these possible points of departure and there are thus multiple possible trajectories for one and the same quasi-continuous line. The simultaneity of the possible points of departure and possible trajectories puts to work the implication of space and of time—which is the definition of rhythm, thus the genesis is given in the work itself: "the work retraces the path and the movements of its genesis," as Klee puts it. We cannot distinguish (we must not distinguish) the product from the production, the figure from its genesis: the figure is the very appearing of its genesis; "*natura naturans*" is given in "*natura naturata*."

Thus, it is not only in the "chromatics" of painting, but equally in the "tonality" of drawing that Paul Klee reaches the pure essence of rhythm. ■

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The Poetics of the Sketch

As life and death, so too, day and night belong together in an extreme way. Their belonging together is extreme not only because one cannot exist without the other but for the way in which they co-exist. Indeed, if one is there as present, the other is also there, but as absent. The extremity of the one is already the other. They belong together as rhythm. This rhythmical alternation shows precisely how day and night belong together in the extreme. Rare and magical it is, however, when day and night are discovered together, either in different scales of twilight and/or in eclipse. The same could be said of the belonging together of word and image. Where there is image there is also word and the other way around, but in this extreme way of belonging together in a rhythmical alternation such that the one is absent in order that the other be present. Rare and magical it is, too, when word and image are discovered together, as in the works of Paul Klee.

One of Klee's watercolors is called *The Scales of Twilight* (*Die Waage der Dämmerung*) (1921; plate 5). It shows the scales of the ongoing movements of a coming-to in which opposites are discovered together, displaying the magical sharpness of the vague and the clarity of confusion. Circle-figure eclipsed by line-letter, one superimposed over the other, showing appearings in their own withdrawal; instead of light and darkness, background and figure, we see the coming-to-light and the coming-to-darkness, and further still, background as figure and figure as background. What is seen is the becoming-figure and the becoming-ground. At the center, a wheel, the turning wheel of a ride on the subtle energy of a light radiation that shows how line is nothing but energy; plants and buildings indicating a natural thickness become the artist's line-drawing and vice versa; scales of distances show nearness approaching, and the enigma of the belonging-together of nearness and distance gets closer and closer, clearer and clearer. The whole scene of the scales of twilight is about coming-to. It is presented within the light and dark nuances of brightness. Here we find a fundamental lesson of Klee's works on the way in which words and images, like day and night, light and darkness, or life and death are nothing but the moving of one toward the other. Because both are movements toward another, we are concerned with movements toward movements and not with fields in connection to fields. Word-movement moves toward image-movement: their relation is a coming from one to the other.

Because the origin and the ends of their movements are already and still movements, it would not be possible to describe their movement of one-toward-the-other by means of a theory of movement that merely pursues the way in which things move in space and time in order to measure their distance or proximity, to evaluate their relative proportions and define the limits of their realms. Word and image are not things in movement but moving movements. That is a fundamental lesson of Klee. They are movements generating movements. They are motional insofar as they are emotional.

Since they are not things in movement but rather moving movements, to describe their movements as the passage from one point to another (from day to night, from light to darkness, from life to death, from word to image or the other way around) would be mistaken. Thus, one is already the other as not yet being the other. It would be wrong, too, to describe these kinds of movement (life, death, day, night, light, darkness, word, image, nature, and art) as passages "from-to" because they are in themselves already out and beyond

themselves. The “from-to” is, so to speak, inside them. A moving movement cannot be conceived teleologically as a “from-to” because there is nothing substantive here such as would belong to the idea of a thing. It is rather the “going through all things, being itself nothing, namely, nothing such that it could always be otherwise,” to recall a passage by Schelling in his *Initia Philosophiae Universae*.¹ A moving movement is ungraspable, slipping away from attempts to reach it through a logic of contrasts and opposition through which a static and neat line could be drawn between before and after, here and there, this and that, si and sol. It is not graspable by means of concepts insofar as the concept obeys the principles of non-contradiction, of identity and of the excluded middle, the rational directive to avoid confusion. A moving movement is in itself already another, as day is already night, as life is already death, as word is already image, art still nature, and the other way around. Moving movements withdraw from the realm of representation: how would it be possible to reproduce what is visible only in and as its own invisibility? Ungraspable, unconceivable, unrepresentable, moving movements—in the sense of that which is itself already other than itself—can, however, be made visible. “Art does not reproduce the visible; it makes visible,” to recall the most repeated words of Paul Klee. Art makes visible movement as the ground of, and for all becoming, another fundamental lesson of Klee.² But how?

It does so by making visible the moving of movement. This “making visible” demands, however, a detachment, and even an abandonment, of a world of things based upon an understanding of the thing as that which is accomplished, formed and shaped, individualized and autonomous—that is, as object. “I want to observe the dimension of objects in a new sense trying to show how the artist arrives at this apparently arbitrary ‘deformation’ of the natural forms of appearances.”³ These words of Klee speak about deformation in the sense of moving the eyes away from pre-formed forms, from forms carried through to an end—*Form-enden*—in order to discover within the formed the forming forces, *Formenden*. The demand, however, is neither to leave behind the realm of forms, nor to vandalize or abuse the forms, but rather to learn to unlearn the formed—the images—in order to rediscover the power of seeing within the formed the coming-to-a-be, in images the coming-to-image, in being the coming-to-be. An expression by the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa—“learn to un-learn”—can help us to understand the *pedagogia negativa* at stake in the rediscovery of the power of seeing that is unfolded in Klee’s work. He himself considered this attention to

forming forces (*Formenden*) rather than to accomplished forms (*Form-enden*) a “possible” meaning of a philosophical view, a “being a philosopher precisely without wanting to be.”⁴ Indeed, philosophers are in some sense “negative pedagogues.” If the vision of forming forces can be called a philosophical vision, it is because the very idea of “idea” is about to be transformed and, to a certain extent, returned to its original meaning of *eidos* and *idea*, that is, of the invisible force that shows possible meanings of the visible in visible meanings of the possible. What probably made Klee hesitate to call the vision of the invisible forming forces “philosophical” was the necessity he felt of conceiving the coincidence of both realms—the invisible and the visible—and thereby denying the sense of form as a passage from a before-form to an after-form, from the invisible to the visible. What philosophy seems to see but fails to conceive of is the movement in its moving event, the forming in its forming, the becoming in its coming-to-be, where contraries coincide and become confused. For Klee this happens because philosophical thought is deeply attached to discursive language that—missing the capacity to say the multidirectional temporal structure of a becoming—tends to reduce it to a linear sequence of before and after. Philosophy lacks, therefore, concepts that would enable it to describe the movement in the “whiling” of its event, the eventfulness of the movement. Therefore, philosophy departs from the form in order to reach the forming, from the eternal to reach the temporal, the repose to the movement.

To describe the moving meanwhile of the movement, the coincidence of the coming-to-form and the formed, Paul Klee proposes another mode of description. He suggests the path of simile (likeness, *Gleichnis*). “The genesis of ‘writing’ is a very good simile of movement,” he claims.⁵ Rather than a “necessary metaphor” or a development of comparisons leading to analogy,⁶ the meaning of simile suggested by Klee is rather the force of multivocality emerging through and beyond univocal and equivocal significations. The polysemy of the words *Genesis*—both beginning, and the biblical narrative about the beginning—and *Schrift*—the Bible and its writing—presents the simile as an experience of direction rather than of signification. The simile disavows the metaphorical: it says merely, as Kafka once remarked, “that the incomprehensible is incomprehensible, and we know that already.”⁷ Disavowing the metaphorical, the simile shows what is in its gerundive is being; it shows the already known, exposing the polysemy already operating within it. Allowing polysemy and multivocality—the simultaneity of several meanings and voices—signification splits. And it is

1 F. W. J. Schelling, *Initia Philosophiae Universae: Erlanger Vorlesung WS 1820/21* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1969), 10.

2 Paul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 1: Das bildnerische Denken*, ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1956), 78: “Bewegung liegt allem Werden zugrunde.”

3 Klee, “Übersicht und Orientierung auf dem Gebiet der bildnerischen Mittel und ihre räumliche Ordnung,” in *Das bildnerische Denken*, 92: “Ich möchte nun die Dimension des Gegenständlichen in einem neuen Sinne für sich betrachten und dabei zu zeigen versuchen, wieso der Künstler oft zu einer solchen scheinbar willkürlichen ‘Deformation’ der natürlichen Erscheinungsform kommt.”

4 Ibid.: “Denn ihm liegt mehr an den formenden Kräften als an den Form-Enden. Er ist vielleicht ohne es gerade zu wollen Philosoph.”

5 Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 78: “Die Genesis der ‘Schrift’ ist ein sehr gutes Gleichnis der Bewegung.”

6 Following the philological understanding of simile such as that proposed by Bruno Snell in his *Die Entdeckung des Geistes: Studien zur Entstehung des europäischen Denkens bei den Griechen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2009); in English: *The Discovery of the Mind: The Greek Origins of European Thought*, trans. T. G. Rosenmeyer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953).

7 Franz Kafka, “On Parables,” in *Kafka: The Complete Stories and Parables*, ed. Nahum N. Glatzer (New York: Schocken Books, 1983), 457.

indeed in the “split of significations” that the “incomprehensible” can appear “as” incomprehensible. Thus, the split brought about by the simile turns the gaze to the literality of the movement of one becoming the other. Instead of a world of oppositions and comparisons, the simile makes possible a seeing of movement as such, in which one is already the other as being not yet the other. Because the simile splits signification and makes visible the incomprehensible movement of coming (or not) to a signification, it interrupts the attention to writing about birth, focusing rather on the literal movement of the birth of writing. The birth of writing is the beginning of a line-drawing. In the beginning was the word, in the beginning was the act: here, in the beginning of a line-drawing, word and act coincide. Read literally, “the genesis [Genesis] of writing [Schrift]” indicates the instant of creation as the drawing of a line, an instant that suspends claims of signification. Showing itself by itself, the writing—that is, the line-drawing—appears rather as notation. The presence of musical notation in Klee’s works is neither allusive nor illustrative. It is, on the contrary, the confirmation of the path of simile, the “split of signification,” as Pierre Boulez insisted in his beautiful book about Klee,⁸ operated by musical notation in which the movement shows itself in its own moving appearing as line-drawing.

The drawing of a line is the meaning of a drawing. But here, once again, the polysemy, and more specifically the polysemy of the expression “drawing a line” shows the split signification of making visible the movement in its moving. To draw a line means, on the one hand, to set an end and thereby to separate and distinguish. This is the dominating discursive meaning of a word. Words draw lines, identify, set distances between things and experiences, un-confusing them. But to draw a line means further and above all the drawing. In the simile “drawing lines,” it becomes indeed possible to see how word and image belong together. In the beginning, in their “Genesis,” word and image involve drawing and drawn lines, sharing writing as their element. The English verb to *write* is originally the same word as the Swedish *att rita*, that means to draw, both coming from the Old German *rīzan*, to tear and draw. It is the same word as the German *Riß* and *AufRiß*, the tear and the sketch. Considered from out of their element in writing, word and image are movements of one toward the other, the multidirectional one drawing toward the other, performing in the movement of drawing the “drama of the last word” about the relation between word and image. (See *Last Word in the Drama* [letztes Wort im Drama], 1938; plate 44.)

The simile of writing and drawing, being the same not being the same, exposes the rarity of the instant in which word and image are discovered together. Here, to draw a line and to draw lines coincide. At this instant, what happens is most rare, namely, the drawing of the drawing of a line and thereby the mysterious the moving “whiling” of a movement is made visible. It is made visible as comet and as musical phrase: appearing after-while as traces of an erstwhile. It is made visible also as an eclipse, appearing in its own disappearing. The drawing of the drawing of a line makes visible the way in which the image that is

left is in itself the leaving behind of the image, an appearing while disappearing or rather the appearing of its own withdrawal. Thus when the word draws a line, when it designates, the drawing of the line—the event of an appearing, e.g. the sign—tends to disappear in the drawn line of signification. As much as the writing is covered up by the written and the saying by the said, the imaging is covered up by the image. The problem is therefore not so much that words cover up images or that images can cover up words, but the covering up itself that takes place within both the word and the image. The old opposition between word and image can be thought of on the one hand as a misunderstanding, but on the other as already an acknowledgment of this enigmatic movement that moves both the word and the image, the movement of showing the moving—the coming-to-word and the coming-to-image—covering it up with accomplished words and images. More closely thought, this does not have so much to do with the “nature” of the word or with the “nature” of the image or even with the “nature” of signification, but rather with the “nature” of the line. Before a “from where” and a “to where”—before tightropes and bridges—the line is moving movement. To “draw” a moving movement is both the only possible and the most impossible. It is the only possible insofar as every life is moving movement and any drawing of lines can only be done from within the moving movements of life. But it is also the most impossible insofar as the drawing of a line will always lag and defer in relation to the movement of drawing itself. The moving force of Klee’s drawings has to do not so much with the vivid suppleness of the movements that appear in front of us but with the drama of a hand trying to draw the line while a line is being drawn. It is the drama of drawing the drawing of a line, the search for an image of the coming to image, a word for the coming to word. In this drama, we can find the source of what could be called Klee’s poetics. Klee’s poetical titles do not explain the images anymore than his images illustrate the titles. It is the drama of drawing the drawing, of painting the painting, of showing the showing that can be called both the poetical source and the source of Klee’s poetics, the poetics of a *bildnerisches Denken*, of a “thinking eye.” If a line is a bridge, the drawing is somehow a suicide, the drawing of a being drawn and the being drawn in the drawing, as in *Suicide on the Bridge* (*Selbstmörder auf der Brücke*) (1913; plate 21). If a line is a tightrope, the drawer is a dancer hovering between swaying and falling.

Some of Klee’s drawings are called *Eidola*, which means, in ancient Greek, small images. Their complete titles are “*Eidola*” followed by a colon and further by the adverb “erstwhile.” One of these is *Eidola: Erstwhile Philosopher* (ΕΙΔΩΛΑ: *weiland Philosoph*) (1940; plate 60).

Another is *Eidola: Erstwhile Cannibal, Man-Eater*. If images appear as drawn from a movement, forming a fragmentary whole or a singular unity, separated by a colon, the separation indicates at the same time the way the movement appears as movement. It appears withdrawing itself. Klee’s *Eidola* shows indeed and very clearly the drawing of a line and in it the withdrawing as a way of appearing as movement. Thus in the image emerging from drawn lines the erstwhile can only appear after-while. To a

⁸ Pierre Boulez, *Le pays fertile: Paul Klee* (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 101.

long conceptual tradition, relying mainly upon Aristotle, of conceiving generation (*genesis*) or coming to be, either as opposed to or as antecedent to corruption (*phthora*) or passing away, Klee will counterpoint the plastic and graphic perspective of a coming-to-be while passing away, showing how close he is to Hölderlin's vision of becoming in dissolution as presented in the essay entitled "Werden in Vergehen."⁹ The distinction between the Aristotelian, teleological view of movement and the graphic or plastic realized by Klee is the distinction between viewing the movement from the point of view of what moves or viewing what moves from the perspective of the ongoing movement. At stake is the distinction between a view focusing on things—words and works—and a view focusing on moving movements—on the event of relations.

From a teleological perspective, one centered on things and works, on words and images—that is, on formed forms—there also corresponds a notion of poetics. It can be called the philosophical notion of poetics. It is "philosophical" not simply because its clearest definition is that of Plato who, in a famous passage in the dialogue *Symposium* determines *poiesis*—the Greek word for creative becoming—as the "passage from non-being to being."¹⁰ It can be called philosophical insofar as it relies upon a view that aims at grasping the moving of movements in words and images, following movements from what can be seen as what remains identical despite the movement. It is a view of movements attentive to what is *in spite of* its movement, a view afraid of a dissolution that would depart from the identification of time with corruption. Here, the coming-to-be is envisaged from the point of view of what has come to be and hence of what no longer becomes or passes away. The becoming is seen from the point of view of what has come into being, the unaccomplished movement is grasped from out of accomplished forms, beginning from destruction. This philosophical meaning of creative becoming, of *poiesis*, can even be called a natural vision. It is quite "natural" to see movement as focusing on what moves. But insofar as, for humans, natural vision is inhabited and inherited vision, and is therefore vision from within a second nature, a transformation of this natural view on the "nature" of movement demands not merely a transformation of vision but the hard and patient learning to un-learn habits of seeing, a *pedagogia negativa* of the formed, in order to begin to see beginnings, that is, movements in their moving. The tragic character of a vision of the moving from within the event or the meanwhile of the moving lies in the impossibility of seeing the moving in the same frontal way that formed forms—which are usually called things or works—can be seen. The vision of the movement while moving, the vision of the coming to a form, to an image, to a word, to being, is a tensed sight, a vision in deep tension with the viewing of formed forms, imaged images, or defined beings. Only in detaching itself from the form, leaving behind appearances, words, and beings, precisely in this tensed distancing from accomplished meanings and

significations, the coming to forms and images—the becoming and appearing—appears in their moving movement as inverted modes of this detachment. In this sense, it is not a *vision in opposition* to a view of forms but a *vision in tension* with such a view. "Deformation," as Klee says, means indeed dis-formation, in the sense of leaving the form behind for the sake of opening up a space in between where a coming-to-form appears in its moving movement. Deformation means the dis-formed way in which a coming-to-be, an appearing, can appear in its event: it appears as the inverted "image" of a leaving behind. In the *meanwhile* of a leaving-behind the form, the image, the word, the becoming, appears in its event, as neither before nor after form, but precisely *while* forming. Here there is no why but solely *while*.

Insofar as the appearing only appears in tension with appearances, its seeing is to a certain extent a confusion with that which is formed and imaged. Confusion is here a word for clarity or even, to use a word of Schelling's, for clairvoyance. Line-drawing, *Graphik*, as Klee names the con-fusion of word and image, or notation—to bring this notion to the full extent drawn in his poetics—is "multidirectional," "aphoristic-multibranched" (*aphoristisch-vielverzweigte*).¹¹ Becoming in dissolution expresses the tense "while" of the "cosmogenetic moment" of the coming-to-form, the drawing of the drawing of a line where the dissolution of forms and the absence of forms, the unformed and the formless coincide. Insofar as a coming-to-form cannot be reproduced in defined images, but solely made visible in the (multidirectional, aphoristic, and multibranched) tense coincidence between no longer and not yet having a form, it can be described neither as a previous or provisional form nor as the preparation of a future form. It is rather a *becoming while in dissolution*—"scales of twilights"—the eventful meanwhile of a pure coming-to, disappearing while appearing. Its realization demands a rediscovery of the power of seeing in between the formless and the unformed through a continuous practice of learning to un-learn the formed.

Klee wrote several teaching notes on the subject of what is here being called *pedagogia negativa*, negative pedagogy. Some of these notes, written for courses held in 1921–22 at the Bauhaus, were published under the title *Pedagogical Sketchbook*.¹² The title of "sketch" seems to suit the preparatory, provisional, and unfinished character of these teaching notes. However, a careful reading of these notes makes possible the realization that "sketch," here, has a totally different meaning. Rather than a before-the-image, "sketch" means becoming while in dissolution, the name for the making visible of a movement in its moving, the name of the drawing of a line-drawing. Its realization is a poetics. Considering the sketch as a becoming while in dissolution, appearing while disappearing, the very drawing of the drawing of a line, not only the notion of sketch but also the very notion of poetics is transformed. Poetics no longer means either a "passage from non-being to being" or even "the force revealed

⁹ Friedrich Hölderlin, "Werden in Vergehen," in *Sämtliche Werke (Stuttgarter Hölderlin-Ausgabe)*, ed. Friedrich Beissner (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1957), 282–87.

¹⁰ Plato, *Symposium* 205b–c.

¹¹ Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 80.

¹² Paul Klee, *Pädagogisches Skizzenbuch: Bauhausbücher 2*, ed. Walter Gropius and László Moholy-Nagy (Munich: Albert Langen, 1925); in English: *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, ed. Sibyl Moholy-Nagy (New York: Fredrik A. Praeger, 1953).

in the appearing of nature...becoming world."¹³ It is rather the making visible of the moving movements of a coming-to, of the realm of in-between and the meanwhile, the interworlds in which nature and world, beginnings and endings coincide. Rather than a philosophical notion of poetics, Klee inaugurates an eye-thinking (*billdenkerische*) notion of poetics, a poetics of becoming while in dissolution, a poetics of the sketch.

Klee's poetics of the sketch is a poetics of the drama of image, the dramatic way a coming-to-image is made visible. Image is drama because, in the image, the coming-to-image—the moving movement of an appearing—withdraws itself, this being the only way in which it can appear in its moving movement. Appearances are neither illusions nor partial views on reality, as a metaphysical philosophical tradition has usually conceived it. Appearances are the absenting way the appearing appears as such; and it is thus that it appears as the eclipse, withdrawing itself in what appears; as comets and musical phrases, erstwhile afterwhile: as rhythm, in other than itself. Nietzsche was very aware of the difficulty of thinking the sketching structure of appearing. For, in the attempt to grasp the "novelty," the "morning," bird-like and irruptive character of the appearing, thinking turns itself to thoughts and images, to "tired and worn-out things," losing its ungraspable moving movements, as he says in one of his most beautiful passages:

Oh, what are you anyway, my written and painted thoughts! It was not long ago that you were still so colorful, young and malicious, so full of thorns and secret spices that you made me sneeze and laugh—and now? You have already lost your novelty, and I am afraid that some of you are ready to turn into truths: they already look so immortal, so pathetically decent and upright, so boring! And was it ever any different? So, what subjects do we copy out and paint, we mandarins with Chinese brushes, we immortalizers of things that let themselves be written—what are the only things we can paint? Oh, only ever things that are about to wilt and lose their smell! Only ever storms that have exhausted themselves and are moving off, and feelings that are yellowed and late! Only ever birds that have flown and flown astray until they are tired and can be caught by hand,—by our hand! We only immortalize things that cannot live and fly for much longer, only tired

and worn-out things! And I only have colors for your *afternoon*, my written and painted thoughts, perhaps many colors, many colorful affections and fifty yellows and browns and greens and reds:—but nobody will guess from this how you looked in your morning, you sudden sparks and wonders of my solitude, you, my old, beloved—wicked thoughts!¹⁴

Nietzsche sees the difficulty in the human will to "catch by our hand," in concepts and words, what is the pure movement of a coming-to. What Klee stresses, however, is that it is only in withdrawing itself from what appears that the appearing can be made visible as moving movement, beyond teleological concepts and the viewpoint of a "from-to." The impotence of human thoughts in conceiving the movement in its moving is itself an "image" of the drama of the image. Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible the drama of the visible and, in this sense, the drama of the being of human life. Thus, if humans render movements immortal by turning them into things and truths, it is because they are themselves an image: the withdrawal of the moving movement of the appearing.

Insofar as the appearing can only be made visible in tension with appearances, an abstraction from appearances is required. Abstraction means here a "drawing out of pure plastic relations" and not merely an "abstraction from natural and objective possibilities of comparison."¹⁵ At stake is not the substitution of natural and objective images for formal and abstract ones but the making visible of the making visible—that is, of the sketching structure of an appearing. The question is rather to sojourn in the in-between of the unformed and the formless, of the un-imaged and the imageless. Heidegger recognized the transformative force of Klee's works precisely in the transformation of the meaning of art that is unfolded in this vision of the image as the place in which appearing appears as withdrawing itself. That is why, for Heidegger, Klee's works are not "images" but "situations," the movement in which human being is brought to the experience of nothingness becoming space.¹⁶ Indeed, the sojourn in the in-between, in the midst of the unformed and the formless, in the meanwhile of a becoming that is made visible in Klee's works, is not the same as trying to overcome the image to reach a state of pure imagelessness. It is, rather, to be described as a holding on to the tightrope that separates and unites the unformed

¹⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, ed. Rolf-Peter Horstmann, trans. Judith Norman (1886; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 177.

¹⁵ Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 72.

¹⁶ Heidegger had plans to review critically his essay "The Origin of the Work of Art" (1935–36) after the impact that Klee's works made on him. He also planned to write a book on Klee. In connection with these plans he wrote some notes on Klee, published for the first time by Günter Seibold, under the title "Heideggers nachgelassene Klee-Notizen," *Heidegger Studies* 9 (1993): 5–12. For some comments on Heidegger and Klee, see Otto Pöggeler, *Bild und Technik: Heidegger, Klee und die moderne Kunst* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2002) and Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Auf einen Stern zugehen: Begegnungen mit Martin Heidegger 1929 bis 1976* (Frankfurt: Societats, 1983).

¹³ This is the formulation of Mikel Dufrenne in his *Le Poétique: Pour une philosophie non théologique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1973), 242: "Le Poétique désigne en premier la puissance qui se révèle dans l'apparition de la Nature. Mais la nature ne peut apparaître qu'en actualisant ses possibles et en devenant Nature naturée: monde."

and the formless, as a hovering at the co-occurrence of what is both no longer and not yet image. In Klee's poetics of the sketch space is in-betweenness and time meanwhileness. What defines the sketch is this spatio-temporality defined as the meanwhile of an in-between, a profound experience of life as hovering and oscillation. The poetics of the sketch, presented in Klee, is as much as anything a poetics of hovering (*Schweben*).¹⁷ But how to grasp the hovering, the meanwhile in-betweenness that in Klee's works allows for a meaning of the sketch as a becoming while in dissolution?

In *Souvenirs*, recalling his memories of *Der Sturm* and the Bauhaus, the artist Lothar Schreyer, who taught performing arts at the Bauhaus, narrates Klee's testimony that concerns this matter, part of a conversation that took place in his studio. Klee said:

I overstep neither the picture's nor the composition's limits. But I do stretch its content by introducing into the picture new subject matter—or rather, not so much new as barely glimpsed subject matter. Obviously this subject matter, like any other, maintains its ties to the natural world. By natural world I am not referring to nature's appearance (as naturalism would) but to the sphere of its possibilities: this content produces images of nature's potentiality...I often say...that worlds have come into being and continuously unfold before our eyes—worlds which despite their connection to nature are not visible to everybody, but may in fact only be so to children, the mad and the primitives. I have in mind the realm of the unborn and the already dead which one day might fulfill its promise, but which then again might not—an intermediate world, an interworld. To my eyes, at least, an interworld; I name it so because I detect its existence between those exterior worlds to which our senses are attuned, while at the same time I can introject it enough to be able to project it outside of myself as symbol. It is by following this course that children, the mad, and the primitive peoples have remained faithful to—have discovered again—the power of seeing.¹⁸

Klee stresses here that what we call things, words, and images, are worlds coming into being and unfolding continuously

before our eyes. Children, the mad and the primitives "remained faithful"—which for Klee means "discovered again"—the "power of seeing" insofar as they discovered once more the coming into being of the world as "interworld," *Zwischenwelt*. The coming-to—the becoming—is a world in between worlds, between the exterior, perceived world and the interior, sensed world. It is a world in between the already dead and the unborn, the realm that might or might not, one day, fulfill its promise. It is the realm of the making possible of the possible rather than the making possible of real actualities. The significance of the notion of "interworld," of a world between the already dead and the unborn is so decisive to Klee that the words chosen for his epitaph were: "I cannot be understood at all on this earth. For I live as much with the dead as with the unborn. Somewhat closer to the heart of creation than usual. But still not nearly close enough."¹⁹

In between the dead and the unborn is the hovering place of an is-being, the event of existence. In between the formless and the unformed is the hovering place of a coming-to-be. Indeed, coming-to-be is nothing but the is-being, the eventfulness of a meanwhile. This, for Klee, is the wisdom of the line. The line is the trace of the being-drawn, that is, of the drawing. A trace is what shows the presence of an absence. A drawing exposes the withdrawing way in which the line drawing appears. In the outlines of the after-while appearing of the erstwhile, the drawing makes visible the sketching structure of the appearing as such.

In the *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, we can follow some lessons in the fundamental achievement of the sketch as an un-learning of the image. The *Sketchbook* deals, we could say, with un-learning principal elements of geometry and chronology, the fundamental sciences of space and time based on a view of movements from the point of view of formed forms, that is, of things. The inherited misunderstanding of movement as the relation between a before and an after, presupposes the misunderstanding of the before and the after as separated lines and dimensions, that can be drawn as an "image," in the sense of a static unity separated from the whole. It is a fundamental misunderstanding of the "point" as static geometrical unity that lies at the basis of a teleological view of movement as a coming from a unity to another, as a coming from-to. The condition of possibility for defining the point geometrically as "that which has no part"²⁰ assumes the point as image and the image as the whole of a unity that cannot be grasped as the sum of parts. For, if it were possible to separate the whole of the image into parts, the part would be the whole of an image as well. Conceived of as the whole of a unity and as the unity of a whole, the image says rather the imaged and thereby the carrying to an end of a forming movement. In this sense, it is the end of a movement that defines the movement. As "that which has no part," the point is nothing but a static, neutral or "dead" point, and the image is nothing but the result or death of a movement. Only from that point of view does it become pos-

17 In a book not often referred to, *Metaphysik des Schwebens: Untersuchung zur Geschichte der Ästhetik* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1985), Walter Schulz, an important Schelling scholar, presents the problem of hovering (*Schweben*) as a metaphysical, logical, and aesthetic problem insufficiently investigated in the tradition and as something that has a fundamental importance for contemporary philosophy in its struggles with the question of the dissolution of subjectivity and categorical confusion.

18 Lothar Schreyer, *Souvenirs: Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus* (Munich: Langen und Müller, 1956), quoted in Felix Klee, ed., *Paul Klee: His Life and Work in Documents* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 183–84.

19 Paul Klee, *Tagebücher von Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1957), 427: "Diessseitig bin ich gar nicht fassbar, denn ich wohne grad so gut bei den Toten wie bei den Ungeborenen, etwas näher der Schöpfung als üblich und noch lange nicht nahe genug."

20 Euclid, *Elements* 1.1.

sible to describe the movement as a “line” between two points or images of things, obtained when lines are drawn in such way that the drawing of lines is not itself made visible.

When the drawing of the line is made visible, however, the point appears as “moving force” (*Agens* in Klee vocabulary) and energy,²¹ “aphoristic-multibranching,” in itself already out and beyond itself, in itself already other than itself. It is density of energy, circulating around itself the tension between centripetal and centrifugal forces. As such, the point is not static unity but ecstasy of differentiation, in itself already the being under way of a line that, following a more precise formulation of Klee’s, is the “first dimension of a point.”²² How can one not, thus, see that a point is a minimal circle? In this sense, the point is a magical, energetic, and dense tension of beginnings, a geomancy, rather than (or before) a geometry. Appearing after-while as erstwhile, the point shows the geomancy of the is-being, so easily mistaken as non-movement in that it is the concentration of forces. Point is to be understood, here, as a turning-point, as the sudden lightning-flash of the instant in which a coming to existence is grasped in its turning-to, a “cosmogentic moment”²³ as Klee calls it. As such, the point can only be, as he says, a non-concept (*Unbegriff*) or rather a non-conceptual concept (*unbegrifflicher Begriff*).²⁴ Thus, it is at once both coming-to-be and passing-away (*Werden und Vergehen*),²⁵ something that is nothing and a nothing that is something (*Das nichtige Etwas oder das etwaige Nichts*).²⁶ An in-between dimensions. This in-between dimensions called “point” is fundamentally a chaos that cannot be opposed to order insofar as it is the possibility for distinguishing order from chaos.

Another meaning of opposition and differentiation breaks through here, demanding another sense of “image,” only possible through a long and patient un-learning of the imperative of image as formed form and static unity of a whole. Being the start of a line, the point is that which appears after-while as erstwhile, reversing in the geomancy of the in-between the order of definitions. The line, “the first dimension,” is for Klee an energetics, itself generated by a universal energetics,²⁷ where active, medial, and passive lines are continuous movements of one toward the other. There is no where-from and no where-to, their movements are but their movings, abrupt and sudden, lightning-flash, earth-irrupting, air-condensing, and water-springing. The line, teaches Klee in the *Sketchbook*, is a “walk for a walk’s sake,” “moving freely, without goal.”²⁸ It makes visible the movement of the drawing hand that is drawn while drawing, showing the illusory nature of the lines drawn between activity and passivity. Being drawn while drawing, active passivity and passive activity outline the dimensions of

the sketch as a making visible of the enigmatic spatio-temporality of the meanwhile in-between. The meanwhile-in-between is the rhythmical and pulsative articulation of a tension of contrary movements. In the sketch, what is made visible is the being drawn while drawing and thereby the tensional articulation of activity and passivity that reveals the gerundive character of the meanwhile in-between. In the sketch, the “being in the middle of the drawing” becomes intense density. It shows the poetic character of the sketch if by “poetic” we understand an intense degree of density, of *Dichtung*. Klee explains the coincidence of being drawn and drawing in the sketch with the graphic sign for the infinite, the Moebius strip in which the active is already the passive and the other way around, but in such an extreme and intense way that the one is already the other not being yet another, being in its presence the absent presencing of the other. The operative distinctions proposed by Klee between active, medial and passive lines and planes, are not static distinction of separated images, realms or domains but directions of movement, both confused and coincidental, that show the “multidimensional simultaneity” and medial area of tensions of the movement in its moving. That may explain why instead of talking about *links*, which would imply neatly drawn lines between images and things, perspectives and instances, Klee will investigate the *ligaments* of tensional movements. In doing so he accomplishes a kind of conceptual *glissando*, in which *links* are heard and seen as *ligaments*, *passages as passing*, *relativity as relations*, *geometry and chronology as geomancy and chronogenetics*, insofar as the non-oppositional sense of difference, the very dynamics of differentiation is made visible. The organic meaning of ligament shows the moving in structural movements, either rhythmically, as in a chessboard, or in numerical divisions, and thus the rhythmical alternation and the numerical sequences are made visible from outside the being drawn by lines while drawing lines. When the moving movement of the lines become intensively dense, rhythmic alternations and numerical sequences lose the rigidity of an either-or and of a one-after-the-other, appearing as one-toward-the-other, being already the other not yet being the other. Lines become drawing forces, crossing of lines, ligaments of movements. In the intense density of the being-drawn by lines while drawing lines, straight lines and measurable angles, outlined entities and separated fields move toward one another, revealing in-between spaces and times. As this intense density of the being-drawn while drawing, the sketch makes visible the symbols of moving movements, of the coming-to-form, to view, to birth, to words. These symbols are the pendulum, the circle, the spiral, the arrow, and the infinite movement of energy (usually called color). They are symbols insofar as they draw the gaze toward the movement’s moving, showing in visible lines the invisibility of trembling and oscillation, in drawn lines the hovering of drawing. Klee’s waterwheels and watermills show, in the subtle ligaments of the symbol, the hoverings and oscillations of the moving in a movement, one already becoming the other not yet being the other. The sketch makes visible the in-between of a meanwhile—the neither here nor there as much as both here and there, the neither before nor after as much as the con-fusion and co-incident of before and after—as hovering (*Schweben*)

21 Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, 24ff.

22 *Ibid.*

23 *Ibid.*, 4.

24 *Ibid.*

25 *Ibid.*, 3.

26 *Ibid.*

27 See here the insightful comments of Jean-François Lyotard in the chapter “The Line and the Letter,” in *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Anthony Hudek and Mary Lydon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 223–24.

28 Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, 16.

and oscillation. In Klee's *Tightrope Walker* (*Seiltänzer*) (1923; plate 20), we see how straight lines rather than "breadth-less length" are drawn lines, tensioned and concentrated movements and counter-movements. The walker on a tightrope makes visible the multidimensional simultaneity of movements involved within and evolving from out of a drawn line. Horizontality and verticality are given dimension through scales of the walker's weight. They appear as paths that cross, oscillating between abysses, where walking is a being-drawn by the drawing in such a way that the almost falling to the ground is already heaven not being yet heaven and the other way around.

The poetics of the sketch is the poetics of a coming-to-fragile and irruptive—that shows the intensity of the ephemeral. Everywhere, the scales of twilight are made visible, showing the twilighted sketching structure of appearances, the way they appear disappearing in their images and words. In Klee's poetics of the sketch we learn to rediscover again the power of seeing the dramatic belonging-together of appearing and appearances. We learn to see, unfolding before our eyes, interworlds in which confusion becomes clarity and hovering sharpness. His poetics reminds us that, between the formless and the unformed, the already dead and the unborn, unfolds the "dusky valley of men,"²⁹ and if "the origin of all human tragedy" lies in the "contrast between man's ideological capacity to move at random through material and metaphysical spaces and his physical limitations,"³⁰ it is because in Klee's works human existence itself appears as the image of the sketching structure of an appearing, a becoming while in dissolution. It shows the drama of the image as the drama of human existence, the drama of this "dream of a shadow" as Pindar called the human being:

Creatures of a day! What is a man?
 What is he not? A dream of a shadow
 Is our mortal being. But when there comes to men
 A gleam of splendor given of heaven,
 Then rests on them a light of glory
 And blessed are their days.³¹

A gleam of splendor given of heaven: the poetics of the sketch
 by Paul Klee. ■

29 Paul Klee, *Gedichte* (Zurich: Arche, 1960); in English: "Two mountains," in *Some Poems by Paul Klee*, trans. Anselm Hollo (Suffolk: Scorpion Press, 1962), 14.

30 Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, 54.

31 Pindar, *Pythian* 8.95–97.

Damir Barbarić

The Look from Beyond: On Paul Klee's View of Art

On the stone slab lying over the grave of Paul Klee is written the following:

I cannot be grasped in the here and now. For I live just as well with the dead as with the unborn. Somewhat closer to the heart of creation than usual. But far from close enough.

In this set of enigmatic lines—first published in 1920 as Klee's manuscript in the catalogue of his exhibition in the Galerie Goltz¹—the artist summarized the essentials of the creative existence allotted to him. Like almost no other artist, he would reflect throughout his life on the wonder of this extraordinary existence, and he was always making new attempts to thoughtfully uncover its strange peculiarity. This brought him into the noteworthy vicinity of philosophy. In the way that philosophy has, in his opinion, a tendency toward art,² so the artist is also "perhaps, without really wanting to be, a philosopher."³

How are the lines quoted at the beginning of this essay to be understood? What is the meaning of this "here and now," whose opposite—viz., the beyond—receives its more precise determination through the gradual unfolding of the text and, as it were, by a detour? What kind of "living" is meant here, which in contrast to the kind familiar to us has absolutely nothing to do with other human beings, but rather lingers in the realm of the dead and the unborn? How does this strange "living" comport itself toward life and the living? And what is to be understood here by "creation," which by all appearances points to an entirely peculiar, other-sided realm extending beyond the entirety of the living?

First it must be emphasized that these lines are neither peripheral, merely intellectual additions by Klee nor *post hoc* rhetorical or poetic adornment of his artistic ability. To the contrary, they summarize his most proper self-understanding of his existence as an artist. As a fifty-three year old he recorded in his diary:

I am armed, I am not here,
I am in the depths, am far away...
I am far away...
I glow amidst the dead.⁴

Two years later, in profound self-reflection, engaging in an extensive comparison with his friend Franz Marc who had died in the war, he again says the same:

My fire is more like that of the dead or of the unborn.... What my art probably lacks,

1 Hans Goltz, ed., "Paul Klee," special issue 2, *Der Ararat* 1 (May-June 1920): 20.

2 Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898-1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), #1081.

3 Paul Klee, "On Modern Art," [in this volume] 13.

4 Klee, *Diaries*, #931.

is a kind of passionate humanity. I don't love animals and every sort of creature with an earthly warmth. I don't descend to them or raise them to myself. I tend rather to dissolve into the whole of creation and am then on a footing of brotherliness to my neighbor, to all things earthly. I possess. The earth-idea gives way to the world-idea. My love is distant and religious.... Do I radiate warmth? Coolness? There is no talk of such things when you have got beyond white heat.... In my work I do not belong to the species, but am a cosmic point of reference.⁵

All these expressions continuously circle the strange residence of the artist and address him from various sides. Outward from every "here," the artist is enchanted in the deep and the distance. All human warmth and coolness having been discharged, he glows indeed, but his glow is no "white" glow of life, but rather one "with the dead." He has dissolved into the whole, has in his "distant and religious love" given preference to the world over the earth, in order to then—no longer a human, but rather a cosmic point—dwell in the neighborhood distant to all earthly beings.⁶

Dwelling in this way, the artist not ungladly gives himself over to the peculiar and poignant moment where his spirit is completely clear and knows itself as an end in itself, and where his thinking is wonderfully broadened: "Early days, things fallen asleep, hidden things, possibilities, melodies of the past and the future, timeless plans, float by, one after the other, and I feel rich under a hoard of gifts and must have hope."⁷ In such productive moments there prevails in him "an ageless philosophical spirit... who overcomes this world, even if it means leading us into the wilderness." Then the artist enjoys "the great privilege" of being "thoroughly calm, completely naked before himself, not the self of a day but the whole sum of self, totally a working instrument" and feels "armed."⁸ In the "good moment" of one such "unsplit instant," there are "no intellect, no ethics" that rule over him. Then he is an "observer above the world or a child in the world's totality."⁹ All at once he is "pure spirit," having become "still and solitary." He feels even relieved of time: "How enjoyable is the impression of timelessness...this precise equilibrium of being, this standing still, where there is scarcely a breath. All activity here is merely mechanical, a mirage. The only thing real is the long,

deep, inward gaze."¹⁰

With these words, anyone who is even slightly familiar with the work of Paul Klee will immediately think of the famous lithograph *After the Drawing (nach der Zeichnung)* from 1919, better known as *Absorption (Versunkenheit)* (plate 41). The words which Gabriele Münter wrote as a commentary to her painting *Man in an Armchair (Paul Klee) (Mann im Sessel [Paul Klee])* from 1913 appear to refer more to the self-portrait by Klee than to her own painting: "Corporeal existence in the world is astonishing, and spirit leads its own life, sunk in the sounds of things and in its own self."¹¹ The face of the artist appears here—by the way, not essentially different from that in a somewhat later oil painting—as solidified into a mask in a thoroughly meditative, inwardly-directed attitude, fully sunk in the looking or rather the hearkening of the hidden inner world. The tightly closed eyes receive no sensation from the outside; their open roundness has narrowed to a horizontal position and resembles the leaves of a plant pressed onto one another. The disappearance of the circular form of the eyes allows the circle of the face to appear all the more in the entirety of the foreground. The human visage appears not only "gripped in a strange metamorphosis and passing over into nature,"¹² but also transforming itself into the encompassing world as a whole. The pressed mouth, circled by a beard, hints at the earth and its growth, while the hairy half-circle high above the forehead hints at the celestial circle of the sun, the moon, and the stars. The closed eyes no longer engage in the optical perception of natural objects, but rather turn inward and, presaging and feeling, open themselves to the cosmic whole. With good reason is this self-portrait by Klee often seen and interpreted in connection with his well-known schema *I-You-Earth-World* that he would develop later in his essay "Ways of Studying Nature."¹³

To grasp more precisely the place where, in Klee's experience, all true artistic creation has its source, it is worthwhile to linger a bit longer with the statements of Klee already mentioned and also with several other related ones. According to his Bauhaus colleague Lother Schreyer, in 1920 he stated the following: "I say it often, but it is sometimes not taken seriously enough, that worlds have opened and open themselves to us which also belong to nature, but into which not all humans look.... I mean something like the realm of the unborn and the dead, the realm of what can come, what would like to come, but does not need to come, an in-between world. I name it an in-between world because I feel it between the worlds externally perceptible to our senses, and can inwardly so take it in, that with analogies I

5 Ibid., #1008. Cf. "Der eigene Standpunkt," in Paul Klee, *Aufsätze, Vorträge, Rezensionen und Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre*, ed. Günther Regel (Leipzig: Reclam, 1955), 59–60.

6 In this respect it makes sense when Peter-Klaus Schuster sees Klee and his art as distinguished by an essential paradox, namely, the paradox "of being through his art here and at the same time not here...of encircling actuality from its opposite side" (Schuster, "Die Welt als Fragment: Bausteine zum Universum Klee," in *Das Universum Klee*, ed. Dieter Scholz and Christina Thomson, exh. cat. [Osfilidern: Hatje Cantz, 2008], 17).

7 Klee, *Diaries*, #373.

8 Ibid., #605.

9 Ibid., #713/714.

10 Ibid., #1076.

11 Quoted in Boris Friedewald, *Paul Klee: Sein Leben—Seine Kunst* (Munich: Prestel, 2011), 57.

12 Carola Giedion-Welcker, *Paul Klee: In Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1961), 51.

13 E.g., Schuster, "Die Welt als Fragment," 15: "The diagram forms simultaneously a head in which the 'I' and the 'you' form the two eyes, the 'earth' forms the mouth with the circling beard, and the region of the 'cosmic commonality' finally forms the cerebral realm of this circling head of Klee's ideal artistic creator of the world." Cf. Jürgen Gloesemer, "Paul Klee und die deutsche Romantik," in *Paul Klee: Leben und Werk*, ed. Paul-Klee-Stiftung, Kunstmuseum Bern, and Museum of Modern Art, NY, exh. cat. [Osfilidern: Hatje Cantz, 1987], 20ff.

can project it toward the outside.¹⁴ Elsewhere he designates this place for the most part as “beginning” or “ground”: “When is the spirit at its purest? In the beginning.”¹⁵ The human spirit reaching there and capable of residing there is designated by Klee most often as “crystal.” In the luminous calm of this place fully beyond, he hopes to divine the nearness of God and light in itself:

A kind of stillness glows toward the bottom.¹⁶
 From the uncertain
 a something shines,
 not from here,
 not from me,
 but from God.
 From God! Were it only an echo,
 Were it only God’s mirror,
 Still it would be the nearness of God.
 Drops of the deep,
 Light-in-itself.
 Whoever slept and caught his breath:
 he...
 found his last end in the beginning.¹⁷

To begin, the human being is only enchanted when “the heart that beat for this world” is, within him, “mortally wounded.” For such a human the “today” loses its allegedly fixed closedness; it splits and becomes “a transition from yesterday.” For such a human, the forms of the terrifying world of today lie only in ruins; the “here and now” things are to him “only memories.” In order to work himself out of his ruins, he must flee. And he flees. In this ruined world he lingers “only in memory.” But in doing so, as a substitute for what is lost and abandoned, his soul becomes “crystal clear,” he becomes the “crystalline character”: “I thought I was dying, war and death. But how can I die, I who am crystal? I, crystal.”¹⁸

With this abandonment of the world here and now, everything depends on not getting stuck halfway, and in general this can occur for two reasons. Either one remains generally bound through an excessively passionate love of life in the world to be abandoned—what Klee believed he observed in his childhood friend Haller—or one remains within the desired abandonment stuck halfway, which Klee discerned in another friend, Alfred Kubin.

For, this friend “yearned for the crystalline, but could not tear himself out of the sticky mud of the world of appearances. His art interprets this world as poison, as breakdown. He has advanced further than Haller, who is a quarter alive; he is half alive, living

in a destructive element.”¹⁹

From these and similar considerations, one can understand the various types of flight and flying but above all the manifold stages and degrees of transition from one to the other that Klee continually portrays. Thus, flight can be something like a purely panicked, terrified, and (so to speak) horizontal running away which yearns to be as far away as possible from the banal world of appearance, but through the constant looking back on the world to be abandoned remains always bound to and mesmerized by it (see *Flight [Flucht]*, 1940; plate 25). It is an essentially different flight if it dares to abandon the whole dimension of the straight-line plane (*Uneven Flight [unebene Flucht]*, 1939; plate 14), and lifts itself vertically from earth-bound creeping, passing over to floating (*From Gliding to Rising [von Gleiten zu Steigen]*, 1923; plate 18). The one floating is indeed freed from the earth and its gravity to the extent that he is already made erect and in his upper body feels the yearning drive to escape, but cannot yet actually fly (*Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying [geht kaum mehr, fliegt noch nicht]*, 1927; plate 15). Even one such as this has not yet brought himself to such a detachedness and weightlessness, in order to be now “more bird” than a merely earthly creature. There are still many other, always more challenging levels on the way to the condition called upon by Klee of freely flying, complete detachedness.

This crystalline condition of the other-sided, extra-temporal, and supernatural perfection, even if it is seldom enough achieved, cannot be permanent. The artist must time and again abandon it and once more descend to the earth: “The conversation with nature remains for the artist a *conditio sine qua non*.” For he is also only the “human, nature itself, and a piece of nature in the space of nature.”²⁰ When necessary, the artist should even force himself to the requisite retreat to nature and the earth: “do not quite leave this world behind.”²¹ Although the relocation into the extra-temporal is exceedingly enjoyable and productive, and residing in “this invigorating sea” gives humans the opportunity “to consider themselves God for the moment,” the “return to the drabness of the workday” remains for him “avoidable.”²² Klee did not want there to be any doubt about this point. In his contribution to the *festschrift* for Emil Nolde, whom he there designated as an “ancient soul, earthiness as human out of flesh and blood,” Klee distances himself and his art in the sharpest terms from those artists whom he calls “distant from the earth and earth-fleeingly abstract.” In particular, such ones “sometimes forget that Nolde exists. Not so I, not myself on my farthest flights, from which I am always accustomed to find my way back to the earth, to disengage myself in a regained weightiness.”²³

From everything stated above, it is clear that for Klee neither the this-sided realm of the earth nor the other-sided being of time-

14 Quoted in Friedewold, *Paul Klee*, 92.

15 Klee, *Diaries*, #944.

16 Note the poem that Klee wrote at the bottom of his very small drawing in 1912, where a stick-man swept away by an irresistible vortex and lamenting the poor is depicted in grotesque lines: “Woe is me under the storm wind of eternally fleeing time, / Woe is me in the abandonment all around of the center alone, / Woe is me deep down in the icy ground of madness.” Quoted in Gloesemer, “Klee und die deutsche Romantik,” 28.

17 Klee, *Diaries*, #948.

18 *Ibid.*, #951.

19 *Ibid.*, #958.

20 Klee, “Wege des Naturstudiums,” in *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre*, 67.

21 Klee, *Diaries*, #636.

22 Klee, “Schöpferische Konfession,” in *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre*, 66.

23 Klee, “Emil Nolde,” in *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre*, 87.

less stillness can alone be considered the proper habitat for the artist. Rather, his residence lies in between, in a sense apart from the difference between the here and now and the beyond, as his goal lies in functioning "as an entity, down here, with connections to what is up there." As an artist it is necessary "to be anchored in the cosmos, a stranger here but strong."²⁴ Oscillating in this way between the beyond that is only ever momentarily touched, and the this-sidedness which time and again is to be abandoned, renewed, and occupied, the artist undertakes "a weighty destiny: to be the hinge between this side and the other side, a hinge at the border of yesterday and today."²⁵

In this lies the real reason for the never flagging fascination with the world of the tightrope walker and similar acrobats that so powerfully affected Klee and prevailed as one of the most commonly appearing themes in his art. This theme is evident in the lithograph *Tightrope Walker (Seiltänzer)* (1923; plate 20) but equally so in numerous related works such as *Entertainer in April (Gaukler im April)* (1928; plate 22) and *Entertainer Festival (Gaukler-fest)* (1932; plate 23).²⁶ It is sufficiently clear from which inner "psychological improvisation" Klee was guided in their production. Balance is extremely difficult to maintain in the venture of the in-between world, where over and under immediately join and pass into one another, and where the bold and confident upsurge can turn at any moment to an inexorable decay and demise. This balance appears to Klee's inner eye as a universal image or (more precisely) symbol, the symbol both of the difficult and dangerous inner struggle of humans for liberation from the gravity pulling toward the earth and binding them to it, and of the tension-filled equilibrium that is especially arduous to maintain between the forces violently set against each other in the in-between realm. In this context he speaks in a Bauhaus lecture of the "tightrope walker with his balancing pole as the most extreme realization of the symbol of the balance of forces." Balancing, the tightrope walker ponders and weighs the gravity and, as such, is himself essentially nothing other than "the pair of scales."²⁷ In the middle of the great in-between, the artist as the cosmic pair of scales balances and weighs the range of gravity.

From this self-reflection also arises Klee's positioning of his own art within a general historical framework. In his opinion, the this-sided and objective art is produced only in a happy world.²⁸ The time of a happy, humanly naïve life was antiquity, whose after-effects he sensed in part in Rome and above all in Naples.²⁹ But in Christianity as well as in its succession in romanticism, the subjective longing for the other-sidedness prevailed. The third way, and for us today the only one remaining, which Klee obviously sees as his own forthcoming task, still lies in uncertainty: "As of now there are three things: a Greco-Roman antiquity (*physis*),

with an objective attitude, worldly orientation, and architectonic center of gravity, and a Christianity (*psyche*) with a subjective attitude, other-worldly orientation, and musical center of gravity. The third is the state of the modest, ignorant, self-taught man, a tiny ego."³⁰ This state is apart from antiquity and Christianity (and romanticism)—whose opposition is, in the question of art, for the most part coextensive with the opposition of the static and the dynamic.³¹ Klee seeks the proper third way. He pursues this third way both in the continuation of the other-sided tendencies which (following Christianity) belong to romantic art, and in the simultaneous separation from the same, whereas he tellingly allows the this-sided ethos of classical art to "wait in the distance": "Why try to tear oneself violently away from a joyful existence here and now?"³²

The romanticism that wishes to "repel the Earth utterly" and ascends over it in actuality "by the dictate of forces that hover, triumphant over the forces of gravity" is designated by Klee as "crass and bathetic" romanticism.³³ But his own way leads the world-fleeing gesture that prevails there upward further still, and is pushed so far until even its earth-averse pathos itself is surmounted and overcome: "In the end I let these forces that are inimical to the Earth soar out into the beyond, until they reach the point of the grand circulation; that way I pass beyond the style of bathos and compulsion to the kind of romanticism that melts into the universe."³⁴ With his "new romanticism" he thus wishes to organize the movement "beyond pathos."³⁵ Only in this way can he say a complete and decisive farewell to the earth—which, by the way, is "not always so very easy."³⁶ In this way he also achieves (which at first glance appears paradoxical) the unfettered distance not only from the earth, but also from the hitherto solely dominant urge to flee from it desperately and at all costs.

In the attitude thus acquired, there is no more negating. Through the extreme escalation that has been accomplished, negating has turned into pure affirmation: "One deserts the realm of the here and now to transfer one's activity into a realm of the yonder where total affirmation is possible.... The cool romanticism of this style without pathos is unheard of."³⁷ Only in this purely affirming point—one which stands over the pathos of the negating elevation and over the whole of the world—does Klee find, in fleeting nearness to the creatively divine omnipotence, that which he had passionately sought: the steadfast "home, where the beginning lies."³⁸ "The individual, which destructively rises above the general, falls into sin. There exists, however, something higher yet, which stands above the positive and the negative. It is the all-mighty power that contemplates and leads this struggle."³⁹ This all-affirming omnipotence remains inaccessible to everyone

24 Klee, *Diaries*, #421.

25 *Ibid.*, #957.

26 On this theme in general: Bernhard Marx, *Balancieren im Zwischen: Zwischenreiche bei Paul Klee* (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 2007).

27 Paul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 1: Das bildnerische Denken*, 5th ed., ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1990), 197.

28 Klee, *Diaries*, #951.

29 *Ibid.*, #392.

30 *Ibid.*, #430.

31 Klee, "On Modern Art," 13.

32 Klee, *Diaries*, #862.

33 Klee, "On Modern Art," 13.

34 *Ibid.*

35 Klee, *Diaries*, #941.

36 *Ibid.*, #957.

37 *Ibid.*, #951.

38 *Ibid.*, #748.

39 *Ibid.*, #112.

who wishes to grasp it. Here, the highest exertion of thinking is also in vain. The yearning entity that is sought remains closed and "the light of the intellect dies out pitifully."⁴⁰ There remains nothing left but to continually pronounce in different ways this last and highest entity in an equally high condition of perplexity, for example as the "unknown...great X,"⁴¹ as "a last secret,"⁴² as the "heart of Creation,"⁴³ or as "the secret key."⁴⁴ Klee speaks about this in his lecture in the following way:

The power of the creative cannot be named. It remains, in the end, secretive. Nonetheless, it is not a secret that does not fundamentally shake us. We are ourselves laden with this power in our subtlest parts. We cannot express its essence, but we can come to meet the source, insofar as it is possible. At any rate we must reveal this power in its functions how it is manifest to ourselves.⁴⁵

Perhaps Klee struggled in close proximity to this "infinite power"⁴⁶ of the creative—which can perhaps be assumed to be behind the always emphatically secretive gate which appears many times in his work—when he invented the reverential designation "a secret spark from somewhere which, smoldering, ignites the human spirit."⁴⁷

This new, cool romanticism, as Klee calls his own artistic creating, does not distinguish itself through any dramatic, world-negating gesture. To it, every dramatic expressivity is alien. For, its unfettered farewell to the world is so complete that it stands at a distance even from farewell itself. "Abstraction from this world more as a game, less as a failure of the earthly. Somewhere in between."⁴⁸ Not from a lack of seriousness but rather from its overflowing comes the stroke of playfulness characterizing the art of Klee, which so often is superficially confused with the merely childish and even the infantile. The fixed and calm position that struggles continually and in various ways for the preservation of the vertical, this position "which is altogether earthbound"⁴⁹ with all its dignified seriousness, belongs to the human intellect and indeed is its highest peak. Furthermore, it disintegrates in the completely dynamic cosmic standpoint and retreats before the new and essentially higher attitude "whose gestures are extremely lively, causing the posture to step outside itself."⁵⁰ The "dramatic art of vertical characters" otherwise characterizing humans,⁵¹ his "physical-human dependence" on earthly gravity and the

apparently inescapable "destiny of confinement"⁵² dominating him gradually are abolished. The earth-bound, always tense and timidly sincere "self-seeking ego" transforms into a cosmic, freely swinging, "divine ego"⁵³ whose weightless mobility beyond the intellect becomes a free creative play: "With the last things, art plays an unknowing game and still reaches them!"⁵⁴

To understand more accurately what this creative play in the immediate vicinity of the "last secret" actually is, and how it is performed by Klee in the construction of his artwork, these general observations should be completed first through the comprehensive presentation of his pedagogical doctrine of art, and second—a still more difficult task—through the detailed interpretation of his oeuvre, which of course here is not possible. Instead, we will add a few suggestive remarks through which the manner and mode of his creating as well as the peculiar site of this creating can be somewhat more precisely determined.

In the cosmic standpoint—what Klee also calls the "standpoint of totality"⁵⁵—all static of earthly things dissolves in the complete dynamism. It turns out that both natural beings and works of art, under their apparent stability on the surface, are in truth unceasing genesis and perpetual becoming: "The creation lives as genesis beneath the visible surface of the work."⁵⁶ The insight that "becoming is more important than being"⁵⁷ provides full clarity to the creating entity about the true mode of being of its residence: "To all that becomes belongs movement, and before the work is, the work becomes, just as the world, before it was,...became, and furthermore it becomes, before it is in the future (will be)."⁵⁸

The artist takes this insight to be the reason he himself becomes likewise completely mobile, comporting himself toward all things in a free and entirely untethered manner. Through the curved and spiraled direction of the line and the qualitative consideration of tonality and color, but especially through the individual rhythmicization of things, he abandons the realm of the numerical and more generally the quantitative and increasingly follows the free, creative intuition. Although in this realm every schematizing generalization easily becomes a misleading oversimplification, it can perhaps be said with Glaesemer that the line and in general the figurative in Klee remain, as a rule, reserved for the realm of the here and now.⁵⁹ At the same time, his line is completely free and lively, moved only out of itself. It playfully sets forth on the sensual adventure of journeying, curving, and bending, and the reluctant return. Regardless of whether it involves the realm of organic growing things, (*Little Tree [Bäumchen]*, 1935; plate 9) of human constructions (*City of Cathedrals [Stadt der Kathedralen]*, 1927; plate 66), or of purely fantastical primeval living things (*Group in Motion [bewegte Gruppe]*, 1930; plate 24), the figures springing from this free play of the line function like fleeting, shimmering islands of forms only ever temporarily wrested from the com-

40 Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," 65.

41 Klee, "exakte versuche im bereich der kunst," in *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre*, 90.

42 Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," 65.

43 Klee, "On Modern Art," 14; Klee, "Emil Nolde," 87.

44 Ibid.

45 Klee, *Das bildnerische Denken*, 17.

46 Klee, *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre*, 199.

47 Ibid.

48 Klee, *Diaries*, #922.

49 Klee, "On Modern Art," 12.

50 Ibid.

51 Klee, *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre*, 132.

52 Ibid.

53 Klee, *Diaries*, #961.

54 Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," 66.

55 Klee, "Wege des Naturstudiums," 70.

56 Klee, *Diaries*, #932.

57 Ibid., #928.

58 Klee, *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre*, 197.

59 Glaesemer, "Klee und die deutsche Romantik," 23.

The line of Klee runs, springs, tumbles, and leaves behind in its idiosyncratic paths now rigorous geometrical trails, now free signs reminiscent of botanical curves of growth. In an unceasing rushing onward it seems in every instance to adapt itself to the milieu; that is, it seems to drive its essence into the modified tempo and the transformed musical key on the earth, in the air, and in the water, in order to transform everything from static being into an active becoming.⁶⁰

Following on the line and drawing, especially when it unfolds further into the spiral indicating infinity, the colors pregnant with quality and the geometrically formed, strongly rhythimized images of squares in Klee appear to be the expression of an attitude more other-sided-oriented and already merging with music. The transitional and in-between stages from one realm to another are indicated through non-representational image-signals such as the arrow, the circle, and the half-circle (*Geometric Spiral* [geometrische Spirale], 1927; plate 27 and *Scherzo with Thirteen* [Das Scherzo mit der Dreizehn], 1922; plate 37).

This growing dynamization also brings the artist to the realization that calmness on the earth is only a "contingent inhibition of matter."⁶¹ The consistent functionality or rather the relativity of all visible things declares itself: "Previously one depicted the things which were to be seen on the earth, which one enjoyed seeing or having seen. Now the relativity of visible things is made manifest, and in so doing imparts expression to the belief that in relation to the world as a whole, the visible is only an isolated example, and that other truths are latent within the majority."⁶² Only now does the artist himself become mobile and thereby also free for the entirely altered goal of his art. "He does not grant...compelling significance" to the natural forms of appearing:

He does not feel so bound by these realities, because he does not see in these culminating forms the essence of the creative process of nature.... Hence he describes the things formed by nature that pass before his eyes, examines them with a penetrating look. The more deeply he gazes, the easier it is for him to connect today's points of view with those of yesterday. What imprints itself on him, rather than the finished natural image, is the image of Creation as Genesis, for him the sole essential image. He then allows himself the thought that the Creation can scarcely have come to stop today, so that he extends the world-creating

activity from somewhere back there forward to the here and now, lending Genesis duration. He goes farther. He says to himself, restricting himself to this world: Our world once upon a time looked different, and it will look different again. And, leaning toward the Beyond, he opines: On other stars things may have assumed very different forms.⁶³

Through this longer statement, the conditions are perhaps provided for understanding the programmatic sentence with which Klee begins the essay that became famous under the title "Schöpferische Konfession": "Art does not reproduce the visible, but rather makes visible" (*To Make Visible* [sichtbar machen], 1926; plate 59). Klee's art does not settle for the representing reproduction of the optical impressions of natural earthly things. To the contrary, its ambition lies in the "making visible of unoptical impressions and representations."⁶⁴ Klee explains what this means in the most detailed manner in the already mentioned brief yet methodologically crucial essay "Wege des Naturstudiums": The artist who knows himself indeed as a creation on the earth but furthermore as a "creature within the whole, i.e., a creature on a star under stars" performs first on the "optical way" an intuitive "escalation of the expression of appearance" of external objects; he abolishes their earth-bound architectonic stasis and, through his creating, brings them into a floating framework of "functional internalization." On the dynamic ground laid as a result, he makes the decisive step forward consisting in the "humanization of the object," i.e., of the elucidation of the "relation of resonance of the self to the object." His eyes cease to be a mere "seeing" and become "feeling." In a "synthesis of external seeing and inner looking," two additional "not optical" ways open up before the artist. In the first of these "metaphysical" ways, the "shared earthly rootedness" of both the object and the feeling artist are brought to exhibition (as it were) from below, and in the second way their "cosmic commonality" is revealed from above.⁶⁵

Relieved of the gravity of the earth and of the attendant confinement of merely human life, the artist in the creatively playful wandering measures in all three ways the great "in-between" of the earthly here and now and the cosmic beyond. Only in this way can he preserve his creative nearness to the infinite movement of the divine ground, the divine beginning. The results of his art run parallel to those of nature. For, no less than those natural ones, they are merely an example of infinite divine creation, in which everything already past and everything future is equally available as the perpetual present. Not least of all, the much-discussed basic symbol of the arrow so prominent in Klee serves to make every static condition both temporally and spatially dynamic, and to combine them through its tension-filled direction with the other equally dynamized conditions. The arrow is the dynamized factor *par excellence*; it refers not only to movement

60 Giedion-Welcker, *Paul Klee*, 131.

61 Klee, "Schöpferische Konfession," 63.

62 *Ibid.*

63 Klee, "On Modern Art," 13.

64 Klee, "Wege des Naturstudiums," 69.

65 *Ibid.*, 68–69.

but also to the initial originating impulse to an actual movement. In this respect it also functions in the work of Klee as a symbol for thoughts and for the will.⁶⁶ Directed upward, the arrow can signalize yearning elevation and liberation, and falling downward, by contrast, danger and destruction. When leading the way sideways, it indicates extension and free opening, sideways transferring and assigning the mostly hidden presence of the future and the past into the tension-filled and nearly-fissured present. In Klee, not only time but also space is moved, thoroughly dynamic, laden with tension. As with every "now," "then," "formerly," and "once," in Klee every "here" and "there" are fully relative, penetrated by one another and finally joining together into a continually changing unity of all, in which "there is no more Above and no more Below, no Horizontal and no layering of the depths, rather only a many-sided hovering in an Everywhere of relations of stone, star, tree, and mountain, of earthly and heavenly."⁶⁷

Klee was well aware of this disconcerting peculiarity of his art, and in his lectures he did not hesitate to express it in a radical manner: "No Here, no There, only an Everywhere. No Long-Short, only an Everywhere. No Distant-Near, no Today, Yesterday, Tomorrow, only a Tomorrow-Yesterday."⁶⁸ Many of his images lack an unambiguous orientation with respect to above and below; many can be, indeed even should be, reproduced upside down. What is presented often does not dwell on the edge of the image, but rather appears to want to push itself outward and beyond. Often in an image everything presented moves from all sides in toward the middle of the image, everything grows and at the same time falls toward the middle, spell-bound, as it were, and irresistibly attracted (see [*Composition with Symbols*] [*Composition mit Symbolen*], 1917, plate 11; *N. H. D* [*Province En-Aitch-Dee*] [*N. H. D. (provinz enhade)*], 1932, plate 64; *Insects* [*Insecten*], 1919, plate 3; *The Scales of Twilight* [*Die Waage der Dämmerung*], 1921, plate 5; and *Printed Sheet with Pictures* [*Bilderbogen*], 1937, plate 36).

Few artists sustain this creative-playful wandering in-between. Many remain stuck on the way there and thus prove themselves to be simply presumptuous. Sometimes they allow the freedom of their inexhaustible liveliness to suffocate under the self-selected burden of the unquestioningly adopted thousand-year-old construction of ideological dogmas and value systems (*Death for the Idea* [*Der Tod für die Idee*], 1915; plate 61). Sometimes they even abandon this freedom when after a long ascent they need to make only one more step to the peak and, having lost the courage and the power to balance any further, out of fear and panic they throw themselves down (*Suicide on the Bridge* [*Selbstmörder auf der Brücke*], 1913; plate 21). As Klee was said to have stated in a conversation: "Few push to the ground and begin to build."⁶⁹ But only these should be seen as truly "called"

as such, that is to say, those today who "achieve some sort of proximity to that secret ground by which the primordial law nourishes every development. There where the central organ of all temporal-spatial animatedness, whether we call it the brain or the heart of Creation, occasions all the functions: who as an artist would not want to dwell there? In the womb of nature, in the primal ground of Creation, which holds the secret key to everything that is?"⁷⁰ ■

Translated from the German by Jon K. Burmeister, Boston College

66 Ann Temkin, "Klee und die Avantgarde, 1912-1940," in *Klee: Leben und Werk*, 67.

67 Carola Griedion-Welcker, "Blumenmythos," in *Paul Klee: Im Zwischenreich; Aquarelle und Zeichnungen von Paul Klee* (Cologne: M. DuMont Schauberg, 1957), 62.

68 Paul Klee, *Form- und Gestaltungslehre 2: Unendliche Naturgeschichte*, ed. Jürg Spiller (Basel: Schwabe, 1970), 13.

69 Ludwig Grote, ed., *Erinnerungen an Paul Klee* (Munich: Prestel, 1959), 91.

70 Klee, "On Modern Art," 14.

Jeffery Howe

Paul Klee and the Unseen World: Ghosts, Somnambulists, and Witches

Haunting questions of fate and destiny frequently appear in Paul Klee's art. Although he worked on a small scale, he dealt with ultimate questions of life and death. An intriguing paradox is that although Klee was supremely rational, he was clearly interested in occult themes, if only as a symbol for spiritual understanding. A casual examination of his complete works reveals over three hundred images of ghosts and the related themes of the occult.¹ These provided Klee with a rich metaphor for the creative process, and subjects that lent themselves to allegorical presentation of themes from psychology, the natural sciences, and social criticism. Allegory was present in his earliest works, and became even more useful in an increasingly repressive environment. Klee had a gift for creating emblematic images, both verbal and visual. In the early 1920s he wrote: "Man is half a prisoner, half borne on wings. Each of the two halves perceives the tragedy of its halfness by awareness of its counterpart."² The pathos of heroism and tragedy informs Klee's works from his early etching *The Hero with the Wing* (*Der Held mit dem Flügel*) (1905) to his last paintings. Although Klee was often simplified as a naïve, even irrational artist, he was immensely analytical and methodical in his construction of images and meanings.³ This did not rule out playfulness, however, and he maintained a love of fantasy and intuition.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries brought a wide interest in the occult and mysticism, from popular interest in astrology and hypnotism to theosophy, spiritualism, and magic. Traditional folk tales of ghosts and nature spirits continued to thrive as well, such as stories of the mountain spirits of the Swiss Alps and witches in the forests and mountains of Germany. Klee made many paintings and drawings of earth and air spirits.⁴ Although he was far too rational and ironic to believe in these superstitions, the traditional legends provided a useful metaphor for physical forces that could be given pictorial form.

Modern art, especially expressionism, was popularly associated with mysticism in the early twentieth century, and scholars have unraveled some of these complex connections.⁵ The new religion of theosophy found many adherents. Theosophy literally means knowledge of God, and modern theosophy was

- 1 Josef Helfenstein and Christian Rümelin, eds., *Paul Klee: Catalogue Raisonné*, 9 vols. (London/New York: Thames and Hudson, 1998–2004). Klee kept thorough records of his production, and he numbered his works within each year.
- 2 Paul Klee, *Notebooks, Volume 1: The Thinking Eye*, ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Ralph Manheim (New York: George Wittenborn, 1961), 407. See also Stephen H. Watson, "Godamer, Benjamin, Aesthetic Modernism, and the Rehabilitation of Allegory: The Relevance of Klee," in *Crescent Moon over the Rational: Philosophical Interpretations of Paul Klee* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 35–58.
- 3 See Bettino Gockel, "Paul Klee's Picture-Making and Person: Tools for Making Invisible Realities Visible," *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 39 (2008): 418–33.
- 4 Some of these works include: *Swamp Water Sprite* (*Sumpf wasser nixe*) (1924); *Storm Ghost* (*Sturmgeist*) (1925); *Earth Devil* (*Erd Teufel*) (1930); *Sea Phantom* (*See-Gespens!*) (1933); *Storm Spirits* (*Sturm-Geister*) (1933); and *Earth Spirits* (*Erdegeister*) (1938).
- 5 See Maurice Tuchman, Judi Freemon, and Corel Blotkomp, eds., *The Spiritual in Art: Abstract Painting 1890–1985* (New York: Abbeville Press, 1986). Also, Veit Loers et al., eds., *Okkultismus und Avantgarde: Von Munch bis Mondrian, 1900–1915*, exh. cat. (Frankfurt: Edition Tertium/Schirn Kunsthalle, 1995). One of the first to deal seriously with this matter was Sixten Ringbom, "Art in 'The Epoch of the Great Spiritual': Occult Elements in the Early Theory of Abstract Painting," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 29 (1966): 386–418. Also Sixten Ringbom, *The Sounding Cosmos: A Study in the Spiritualism of Kandinsky and the Genesis of Abstract Painting* (Åbo: Åbo Akademi, 1970).

founded in 1875 by Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831–91) and Col. Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907). It was a syncretic blend of various mystic traditions, with an overlay of the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin. Artists such as Wassily Kandinsky and Franz Marc, both close friends of Klee, were drawn to theosophy early in their careers. Kandinsky's manifesto *Concerning the Spiritual in Art* (1912) justified abstract art as a powerful vehicle for revealing and encouraging spiritual insight. By this date, however, Kandinsky seems to have been moving away from earlier interests in theosophy toward a more personal spiritual belief.⁶ Klee's own attitude toward mysticism is generally ironic and skeptical, even scornful.⁷ He expressed deep doubts about the theosophy of Rudolph Steiner in his diaries.⁸ Steiner was a leading Swiss mystic who founded the Goetheanum, a center for the study of anthroposophy, an outgrowth of his earlier involvement in theosophy, at Dornach, Switzerland in 1914. Klee denied any connection to theosophy in a 1919 letter to Oskar Schlemmer: "With theosophy I have never concerned myself."⁹ Nonetheless, Klee was denied a teaching post in Stuttgart in 1919 in part because of suspicions that he was a Jew and theosophist.¹⁰



Fig. 1: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Lump Spirits, Wisp Spirits and Light Spirits (the Last Very Fragmentary)* (*Klumpgeister, Wischgeister u Lichtgeister [letztere sehr fragmentarisch]*), 1908/13. Pencil on paper on cardboard, 14.5 x 21.2 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

Klee was intrigued with topics in which he could not wholeheartedly believe, yet found useful for satire and as serious metaphors for the creative process. Not only his friends Marc and Kandinsky, but his own wife Lily, was keenly interested in astrology and theosophy.¹¹ Occultism and spiritualism provided a new and potentially liberating perspective on religion and health for many.¹²

Klee possessed a vivid imagination, a gift that had marked his earliest years. In his diary he recalls very early memories of seeing images from his drawings come to life: "Evil spirits that I had drawn (three to four years) suddenly acquired real presence. I ran to my mother for protection and complained to her that little devils had peeked in through the window (four years)."¹³ As a child, the shapes that Klee drew seemed to come to life and escape from their paper world. He continued to create new worlds through his art, long after he had grown out of his child-

6 Kenneth Lindsay and Peter Vergo, eds., *Kandinsky: Complete Writings on Art* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994), 117. For Franz Marc's links to theosophy, see John F. Moffitt, "Fighting Forms: The Fate of the Animals. The Occultist Origins of Franz Marc's 'Farbentheorie,'" *Artibus et Historiae* 6, no. 12 (1985): 107–126.

7 Marcel Franciscano notes, "Nor does Klee ever refer to the literature of the mystical tradition except with scorn, such as he directed against Rudolf Steiner's theosophy in 1917–18." See Marcel Franciscano, *Paul Klee: His Work and Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 3.

8 Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), #1088: "Theosophy? What makes me particularly suspicious is the description of the visions of color. Even if no fraud is involved, one is self-deceived. The coloration is unsatisfactory, and the allusions to formal composition are downright comical. The numbers are impossible. The simplest equation has more meaning. The psychological aspect of the 'schooling' is suspicious too. The instrument is suggestion. But truth does not require a lack of resistance in order to impose itself. Naturally I read only part of the book, because its commonplaces soon made it unpalatable to me."

9 From a letter to Schlemmer (in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart Oskar Schlemmer Archive) quoted in Karin von Maur, *Oskar Schlemmer and die Stuttgarter Avantgarde 1919* (Stuttgart: Staatliche Akademie der Bildenden Künste Stuttgart, 1975), 11, quoted in O. K. Werckmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career, 1914–1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 216. Werckmeister quotes the original German: "Mit Theosophie habe ich mich nie beschäftigt."

10 Franciscano, *Paul Klee*, 242: "Klee's first real prospects for a teaching

position came from Stuttgart. In June 1919 he was proposed by a student committee of the Stuttgart Academy headed by Oskar Schlemmer to replace Adolf Hölzel, who had resigned his professorship. But the academy refused him on the ground that he was too 'dreamy' and 'feminine' an artist, a decision supported by the local press, in one instance with particular nastiness. Not only was his art dismissed—hardly a surprise to him, one would imagine—but he was accused of being a Jew and a theosophist, the last evidently being the worst that could be said against him. After this rejection by Stuttgart, with its ad hominem component, Klee must have welcomed his Bauhaus invitation all the more."

11 Sabine Redal, citing Felix Klee in *Paul Klee: The Berggruen Klee Collection in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1988), 191.

12 Heather Wolfgram, *The Stepchildren of Science: Psychical Research and Parapsychology in Germany, c. 1870–1939* (New York: Editions Rodopi, 2009), 50, 64.

13 Klee, *Diaries*, #10.

hood fear of devils.

Although resemblance can be seen as forging a kind of magical identity with the subject depicted,¹⁴ Klee left straightforward realism behind after his student days. He famously declared in his "Creative Credo" that the role of art was to create, not imitate: "Art does not reproduce the visible; rather, it makes visible" (*Kunst gibt nicht das Sichtbare wieder, sondern macht sichtbar*).¹⁵ The age-old criticism of painting as mere imitation of the visible world, copying without thought, is refuted here by Klee. He further declared that his artistic vocation made him something of a medium, linking this world with a spiritual realm: "I cannot be understood at all on this earth. For I live as much with the dead as with the unborn. Somewhat closer to the heart of creation than usual. But not nearly close enough."¹⁶ Parallels between the creative process and the goal of mysticism, to extract deeper meaning from the superficial appearances of life, appear again and again in Klee's art.

GHOSTS

Echoes of the past and future are often found in Klee's art; earthly and spiritual planes intersect and are revealed by the clairvoyant artist. An early drawing, such as *Lump Spirits, Wisp Spirits and Light Spirits (the Last Very Fragmentary)* (*Klumpgeister, Wischgeister u Lichtgeister [letztere sehr fragmentarisch]*) (1908; fig. 1), shows the faint hovering forms of spirits of the earth and air. The wiggly drawing style here is reminiscent of James Ensor, the Belgian symbolist and expressionist artist, whose works Klee discovered in 1907 through his friend Ernest Sonderegger.¹⁷ Ensor's 1888 etching *Witches in a Windstorm* rather closely resembles Klee's drawing. Klee noted his admiration for Ensor in his diaries.¹⁸ The artist's satirical bent and emphasis on drawing paralleled Klee's own predilections at that time. Tubby, wrinkly "lump spirits" cavort on the ground level, while wispy spirits float overhead in Klee's humorous drawing.

Klee's images of ghosts often have a comic aspect, with spirits found in unexpected settings, as in his 1915 drawing *Spook in the Butcher's Shop* (*Spuck in der Metzger*) (plate 28). As immaterial spirits, food should be the last thing that ghosts would want, and indeed one of the abstract figures raises his arms and recoils from the animal on the table. The animal, humans, and even the table are drawn with similar shapes, suggesting their underlying kinship. Klee's drawing style is now much simpler and more abstract, using flattened two-dimensional shapes that look more mechanical than organic. Their stiff movements remind one of marionettes, controlled by unseen forces.

Klee's depictions of ghosts resonated with contemporary occultists, who tried to claim kinship with him. In 1919 the art



Fig. 2: Paul Klee, *Mr. Death (Herr Tod)*, 1916. Plaster, wood, and cloth, 48 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

critic Eckart von Sydow described Klee as a clairvoyant whose works impressed another occultist:

He listens, quite motionlessly, to the inner voice which becomes audible within him; as if trembling, this voice whispers: "Take the most sharp-ended pencil in your hand and the tenderest brushes, do not move, but wait, wait, until your hand moves by itself." ...

...And his eyes tell of mystical practices—how often he must have attempted to aim his glance at the other side of the moon: thus looks only a man who has won the subtlest knowledge from abnegation....

...Does Klee consciously concentrate that way? He probably renders the inner states of his soul as a copy-faithful imitator. And also the state of [transcendental] realities? Probably; for a clairvoyant who saw the drawing *Souls of the Deceased Approach a Table Set*

14 Michael Cole, "The Demonic Arts and the Origin of the Medium," *Art Bulletin* 84, no. 4 (Dec. 2002): 621–40.

15 Klee, "Creative Credo," in *The Thinking Eye*, 76–80.

16 Quoted in Franciscano, *Paul Klee*, 5.

17 Charles Werner Haxthausen, *Paul Klee: The Formative Years* (New York: Garland, 1981), 222.

18 Klee, *Diaries*, #798.

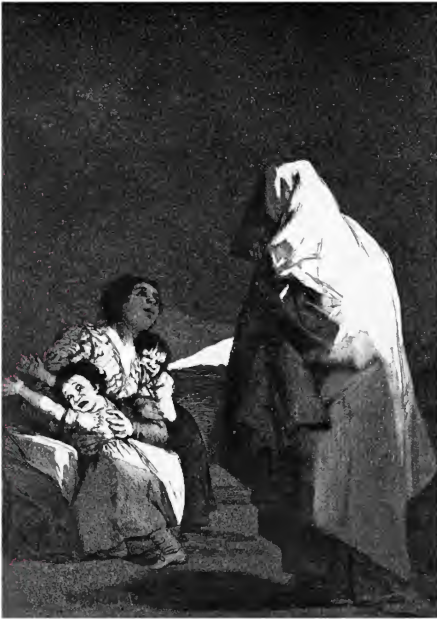


Fig. 3: Francisco Goya (1746–1828), *Here Comes the Bogeyman* (*Que viene el Coco*), pl. 3, *Los Caprichos*, 1799. Etching and aquatint, 21.5 x 15 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Gift of M. Knoedler and Co., 18.64(3).

with Food exclaimed in astonishment: "That is exactly how I see these beings!" Is it a general human state of fantasy? Are supernatural phenomena really perceivable to certain men?¹⁹

Spook in the Butcher's Shop may have been the drawing that surprised von Sydow's clairvoyant. Klee later returned to this theme in a painting entitled *Starving Spirits* (*hungernde Geister*) (1934; fig. 12), discussed below. Klee's titles use a variety of synonyms for spirit beings, including spirit (*Geist*), spook (*Spuck*), phantom (*Phantom*), and ghost (*Gespens*). Each implies a slightly different shade of meaning.

Among Klee's more engaging images of ghosts are some of the hand puppets he made for his young son, Felix (fig. 2). These were used to enact tales of fantasy and imagination that he performed on a miniature stage. The hand is the tool for metamorphosis and creativity, and takes on an active role in these small puppets, controlled by, but seemingly independent of the puppet-master when the viewer suspends their disbelief.

The theme of deception implicit in this theater reminds one of Francisco Goya's *Here Comes the Bogeyman*, from his graphic series *Los Caprichos* of 1799 in which a man dresses in a sheet to impersonate a ghost in order to frighten small children (fig. 3). Puppets, which perform as surrogate actors, are whimsical and ominous, as if a part of one's body started to act independently. On one level, Klee and Goya used themes of ghosts to satirize the credulity of people. There may be more to these comic figures, however. Marcel Francisocono highlights the daemonic quality of these puppets: "As Klee conceives his puppets they are often closer to magical beings—daemons or demiurges—than to human beings. Puppet and daemon for Klee have in common that they are both under the control of higher forces, the vessels of wills not their own."²⁰ Themes of freedom and creative independence were often expressed metaphorically by Klee.²¹ The intimate scale of these puppets, and their use with children, shows him breaking down the barriers between the fine arts and crafts.

SPIRITUALISM AND SOMNAMBULISM

Ghosts represent the survival of the human personality after death. They appear frequently in literature from biblical times through Shakespeare, and are a staple of romantic writing and art. Contact with ghosts in earlier history was generally a one-way street, with the ghosts appearing to pass on a message to living mortals or to take revenge on them. Dialogue with spirits took on a new interactive form after 1848, however. After the Fox sisters in upstate New York demonstrated an alleged means of communicating with the spirits of the dead through loud rapping signals in 1848, the floodgates opened for many imitators to follow with their own versions of spiritual telegraphy.²² These became increasingly elaborate, with so-called mediums not just translating messages coded in table rappings, but actually bringing forth physical manifestations, including solid objects and material from the spirit world, in the form of ectoplasm. The most ambitious mediums actually brought forth full size images of the deceased in ghostly form. Unfortunately, these manifestations of ectoplasm were generally bits of cotton coughed up from the mediums' throats, and the simulacra of the deceased were found to be imposters swathed in gauze and coated with white makeup. Despite the many exposures of phony mediums, the practice continued to attract believers until well into the twentieth century. For many, the yearning for comfort and continued contact with the lost loved ones overshadowed their doubts. The literature on spiritualism is vast, reflecting its popular appeal then and now.²³

²⁰ Franciscano, *Paul Klee*, 193.

²¹ Stephen H. Watson, "A Sketch an Essence: Schematic Thoughts on Paul Klee and the Image of the Daemonic," *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2011): 253–75.

²² Ruth Brandon, *The Spiritualists* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1984). Spiritualism was particularly strong in America. See Charles Calbert, *Haunted Visions: Spiritualism and American Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).

²³ Some notable examples of the spiritualist literature include: F. W. H. Myers, *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death* (London: Langman, 1903); L. Maoutin, *Le magnétisme humain: L'hypnotisme et le spiritualisme moderne, considérés aux points de vue théorique et pratique* (Paris: Perrin,

¹⁹ Eckart von Sydow in *Münchener Blätter* 1, no. 6 (1919) reprinted in *Die deutsche expressionistische Kultur und Malerei* (Berlin: Im Furch, 1920), 124–26. Quoted in Werckmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career*, 199.

Noted intellectuals defended this movement, including the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who argued that it was a real phenomenon, but based on idealist constructs in the mind of the medium, not the reality of ghosts, in his "Essay on Spirit Seeing."²⁴ One of the major figures in German spiritualism was Justinus Kerner, whose most famous work was *The Seeress of Prevorst* (*Der Seherin von Prevorst*) (1829).²⁵ Kerner was a doctor and also an amateur artist who experimented with abstract compositions based on ink-blots that anticipated surrealist automatism and the ink-blots of the

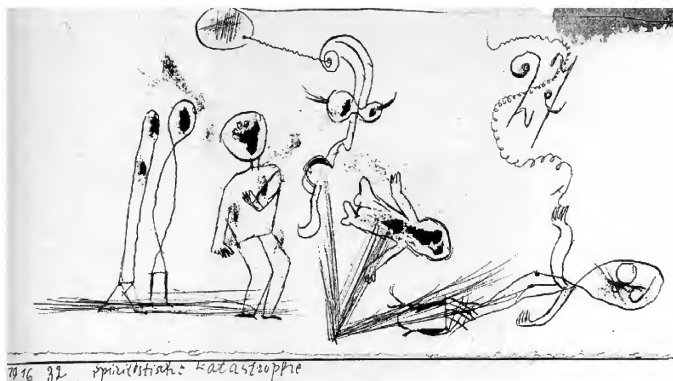


Fig. 4: Paul Klee, *Spiritualist Catastrophe* (*Spiritistische Katastrophe*), 1916/32. Pen on paper on cardboard, 7.4 x 15.7 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

Swiss doctor Hermann Rorschach, which were published in his book *Psychodiagnostik* in 1921.²⁶ Other noted German researchers of psychic phenomena included Carl du Prel and Eduard von Hartmann.²⁷

Klee's drawing *Spiritualist Catastrophe* (*Spiritistische Katastrophe*) has been linked to tragic events of 1916 (fig. 4). His own diaries point to the connection: "A fateful year. At the end of January, Louis Mailliet's wife died while giving birth to a son, her first child. On March 4 my friend Franz Marc fell at Verdun. On March 11 I was drafted at the age of 35."²⁸ At the center of the drawing, a shocked head is linked to the body of a small figure, most likely a child. Mailliet was a close friend and fellow artist who had traveled to North Africa with him. At right a fallen figure may represent Franz Marc. The enigmatic number twenty-seven hovers above him. Marc (February 8, 1880–March 4, 1916) was killed before his twenty-seventh birthday. At left, three figures (or perhaps two figures and a mirror) look on. The tragedies of life and the war could not but affect Klee. In a letter to Alfred

Kubin in 1919 he wrote: "The hard times have strongly influenced my art in an ethical sense. There has been a complete breakthrough of the religious."²⁹

What Klee meant by this is controversial; O. K. Werckmeister vigorously denied that Klee meant that he had become religious in a conventional sense: "Still, Klee cannot possibly have meant to say that as a result he had become religious. Rather, he was alluding to a newly emerging turn toward the religious in his work, whereby he was linking up with a general tendency in the modernist German art world."³⁰ Marcel Franciscano contests this view, however: "In dismissing Klee's 'turn to religion' in 1918 as a despondent reaction to his faltering sales of the time, Werckmeister ignores a fact to which his diaries and his letters both attest, that he had been occupied with religious questions since his youth."³¹

SPIRITUALISM IN MUNICH

Munich, where Klee attended art school and first established his career, was a cosmopolitan city with both an active international art scene and leading psychic researchers.³² Baron Alfred von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929) was one of the pre-eminent German researchers of spiritualism in the early twentieth century.³³ A trained psychotherapist, he began researching hypnotism and telepathy in the late nineteenth century. In the early twentieth century, he became fascinated with so-called "physical medi-

1907); Frank Podmore, *The Newer Spiritualism* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1910); and Arthur Conan Doyle, *The History of Spiritualism*, 2 vols. (New York: George H. Doran, 1926). Myers founded the Society for Psychical Research in London in 1881. A recent exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art featured spirit photography; see: Clément Chéroux et al., *The Perfect Medium: Photography and the Occult* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

24 Arthur Schopenhauer, "Essay on Spirit Seeing," in *Parerga and Paralipomena: Short Philosophical Essays*, trans. E. F. J. Payne, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 225–310. See especially 229, 285, and 292. Schopenhauer argues that the image of the deceased is not a real ghost, but an image (eidolon) of the deceased, in the mind of the seer.

25 Justinus Kerner, *The Seeress of Prevorst* [*Der Seherin von Prevorst*], trans. Catherine Crowe (New York: Partridge and Britton, 1855).

26 Hermann Rorschach, *Psychodiagnostik* (Bern: H. Huber, 1998). See also Bernard Harper Friedman, "Hermann Rorschach as Artist," *Arts Magazine* 53, no. 8 (Apr. 1979): 128–34.

27 Carl du Prel, *Philosophy of Mysticism* (London: George Redway, 1889). Eduard von Hartmann, *Philosophy of the Unconscious*, trans. N. C. Coupland (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1950).

28 Klee, *Diaries*, #965.

29 Quoted in Werckmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career*, 111.

30 *Ibid.*

31 Marcel Franciscano, review of *The Making of Paul Klee's Career, 1914–1920* by O. K. Werckmeister, *Art Bulletin* 73, no. 4 (Dec. 1991): 698.

32 Corinna Treitel, *A Science for the Soul: Occultism and the Genesis of the German Modern* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004), esp. 110–18.

33 Eberhard Bauer, "Spiritismus und Okkultismus," in Loers et al., *Okkultismus und Avantgarde*, 60–80. See also Veit Loers and Pia Witzmann, "Munchens okkultistische Netzwerk," in the same volume, 238–43.



Fig. 5: Alfred von Schrenck-Notzing (1862–1929), *Author's Flashlight Photograph, 23 June 1913* (medium "Stanislava P." materializing ectoplasm), in *Phenomena of Materialisation* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923), fig. 173.

ums" who materialized ectoplasmic or teleplasmic evidence of spirit life. One of his noted research subjects was the medium Stanislava P., who displayed extraordinary talents for physical manifestations (fig. 5).³⁴ Schrenck-Notzing, like many other psychic researchers in Britain and Europe, followed strict procedures for observation and recording of phenomena, utilizing the techniques of empirical science for his experiments.³⁵

Mediums insisted that they were mere vehicles for communication between our world and the world of spirits. The messages they conveyed did not come from them, they insisted; indeed they often claimed to have no memory of the séance afterward. Their sensitivity allowed them to respond to forces of which others were unaware. They could enter a sort of twilight zone between the living and the dead. This could be a powerful metaphor for the creative artist, as Klee noted in his description of a *Zwischenwelt*, a world of potential meanings:

In our time worlds have opened up which not

34 Alfred von Schrenck-Notzing, *Phenomena of Materialisation: A Contribution to the Investigation of Mediumistic Teleplastics* (1914), trans. E. E. Fournier d'Albe (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1923). See also Andreas Fischer, "In the Darkroom of a Medium Researcher: Albert von Schrenck-Notzing and the Phenomena of Materialization," in Claudia Dichter et al., eds., *The Message: Kunst und Okkultismus/Art and Occultism*, exh. cat. (Cologne: Walther König; Bochum: Kunstmuseum Bochum, 2007), 183–86.

35 See Wolfram, *Stepchildren of Science*, 141ff.

everybody can see into although they too are a part of nature. Perhaps it's really true that only children, madmen and savages see into them. I mean, for example, the realm of the unborn and the dead, the realm of what can be, might be, but need not necessarily be. An in-between world. I call it that because I feel that it exists between the worlds our senses can perceive, and I absorb it inwardly to the extent that I can project it outwardly in symbolic correspondences.³⁶

The artist mediates between the realm of ordinary consciousness and this higher reality, using symbolic forms to communicate his vision. This search for correspondences between heaven and earth is rooted in the celestial arcana of the eighteenth-century Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg as well as in symbolist literary and art theory. The investigation of symbolic forms led Klee to investigate the roots of language as well (see the essay by Claude Cernuschi in this volume, 105–134).

Some artists worked directly with mediums; the Swiss-born artist Albert von Keller participated in séances with Carl du Prel and Schrenck-Notzing, taking photographs of the hypnotized seers for future use in finished paintings on mediumistic themes.³⁷ Keller, du Prel, and Schrenck-Notzing were among the founders of the *Psychologische Gesellschaft* (Psychological Society) in Munich in 1886. Keller studied hypnotic phenomena, and claimed to have received the inspiration for his major work, *The Resurrection of Jairus' Daughter* (1886), in a dream.³⁸ He co-founded the Munich Secession in 1892, and was its president from 1896 to 1920.

Several of Klee's self-portraits exemplify inspiration. O. K. Werckmeister persuasively suggests that the missing ears and closed eyes in Klee's *Absorption* (*Versunkenheit*) (plate 41) of 1919 may refer to a passage by Kandinsky in *On The Spiritual in Art*: "The artist shall be blind to 'recognized' or 'unrecognized' form, deaf to doctrines and desires of his time. His open eye shall be focused on his inner life, and his ear shall always be directed toward the mouth of inner necessity."³⁹ Werckmeister also perceptively linked the title *Versunkenheit* to a letter from Klee to his wife in February 1918:

Everything around me sinks away [versinkt],
and good works come into being by themselves before me.... My hand is completely the tool of a remote sphere. Neither is it my head which functions here, but something different, something higher, more remote, wher-

36 Felix Klee, ed., *Paul Klee: His Life and Work in Documents* (New York: George Braziller, 1962), 183–84.

37 Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker and Gian Casper Bott, *Séance: Albert von Keller and the Occult*, exh. cat. (Seattle: Frye Art Museum, 2010).

38 Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, "Albert von Keller als Malerpsychologe und Metapsychiker," *Psychische Studien* 48, nos. 4–5 (Apr.–May 1921): 208.

39 Quoted in Werckmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career*, 180.

ever it may be. I must have great friends in these places, light ones, but also dark ones. That's all the same to me, I find them all to be of great benevolence.⁴⁰

These two self-portraits are isolated, even withdrawn. Klee could not identify with the fiery passion of Franz Marc, which expressed itself through empathy with animals and a passion for destruction. Instead he favored the cool detachment of ghosts. In his diary he wrote after the death of Marc at Verdun in 1916:

I only try to relate myself to God, and if I am in harmony with God, I don't fancy that my brothers are not also in harmony with me; but that is their business. One of Marc's traits was a feminine urge to give everyone some of his treasure. The fact that not everyone followed him filled him with misgivings about his path. I often anxiously surmised that he would return to earthly simplicity, once the ferment was over, that he would not come back in order to rouse the world to some grand vision, but entirely from a human impulse. My fire is more like that of the dead or of the unborn. No wonder that he found more love.⁴¹

Klee's unsentimental analysis unsparingly describes his reserve and tendency toward detachment. He turned inward for his sources of inspiration. In this emphasis on interiority he is linked to the previous generation of symbolist artists who championed their internal worlds, such as Fernand Khnopff and Odilon Redon. Khnopff's *I Lock My Door Upon Myself* of 1891 was purchased for the Munich Pinakothek in 1893, and was surely known to Klee.⁴² Similarly, Redon's *Closed Eyes* of 1890 foreshadows the inward looking meditation of *Versunkenheit*.

Klee summed up his view of the role of art as the only valid, if imperfect, transport to transcendental truths in his "Creative Credo":

Art is a parable of Creation; it is an example, as the terrestrial is an example of the cosmos.... At the highest level, imagination is guided by instinctual stimuli, and illusions are created which buoy us up and stir us more than do the familiar things of earth. In that realm are born the symbols which comfort the mind, which perceives that it need not be chained to the potentialities of terrestrial things. Up there, ethical seriousness reigns, and along with it impish laughter at the learned apparatus of scholars and parsons.

Neither higher potentiality nor reality can be of any avail to us. Away with everyday things and away with the occult sciences—they are barking up the wrong tree. Art goes beyond both the real and the imaginary object. Art plays an unknowing game with things. Just as a child at play imitates us, so we at play imitate the forces which created and are creating the world.⁴³

This quotation clearly shows that Klee rejected both realism and occultism, except as metaphors, and illuminates the frequent comparison of his art to that of children. "Art is a parable of Creation," he wrote. Klee's works are thoughtful and sophisticated explorations of the tension between the work of art as material object and its meaning.

Unlike children's art, Klee's work often explores the tension between the darker aspects of human nature and the higher. He expressed this dualism in terms of the daemonic and the celestial in his diary in 1916:

New work is preparing itself; the daemonic shall be melted into simultaneity with the celestial, the dualism shall not be treated as such, but in its complementary oneness. The conviction is already present. The daemonic is already peeking through here and there and can't be kept down. For truth asks that all elements be present at once. It is questionable how far this can be achieved in my circumstances, which are only halfway favorable. Yet even the briefest moment, if it is a good one, can produce a document of a new pitch of intensity.⁴⁴

The daemonic and the celestial are not to be considered as diametrically opposed, but joined in complementary oneness, a new synthesis. As with William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, or the alchemist's quest for the *conjunctio oppositorum* (union of opposites), good and evil form a new unity. Klee's artistic sophistication is evident in his reference to simultaneity, a critical term for both cubists and especially futurist artists. The visual representation of simultaneous events normally separated by time or space, or in Klee's case, earthly and divine (or daemonic and celestial) forces, adds dynamism and tension to his works. Klee, like Robert Delaunay, was intrigued by the simultaneous contrast of colors that had been a preoccupation of earlier neopressionists such as Georges Seurat. Delaunay, whom Klee met in Paris in 1912, termed his style orphism, suggesting the connection to mysticism as well as color. For Klee, the simultaneous contrast of colors could be a metaphor for good and evil and other dialectical oppositions, and he cited Delaunay as a

40 Ibid., 180–81

41 Klee, *Diaries*, #100B.

42 Jeffrey Howe, "Dreams and Death," in *The Symbolist Art of Fernand Khnopff* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1982), 105–116.

43 Klee, "Creative Credo," in *His Life and Work*, 155.

44 Klee, *Diaries*, #107D.

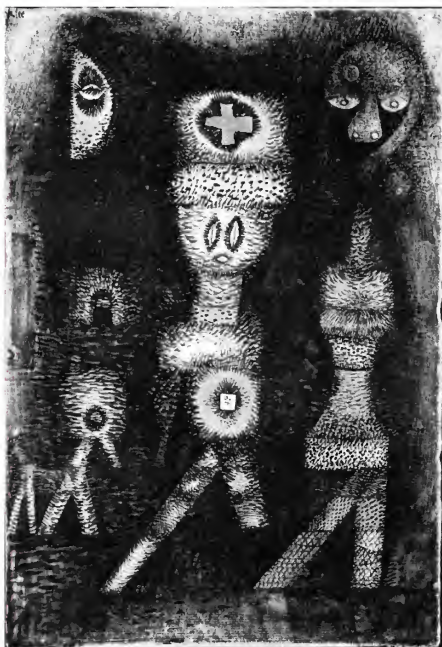


Fig. 6: Paul Klee, *Materialized Ghosts* (*Materialisierte Gespenster*), 1923/24. Pen, pencil, and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 37 x 25.2 cm, Rosengart Collection, Lucerne.

key example.⁴⁵

Klee's penchant for conjoining opposites included dualities of childlike and sophisticated, abstract and realistic, interior and exterior, seen and unseen, past and present (and future), earthly and spiritual, comic and deeply serious, and primitive and refined. Some of his images, such as *Materialized Ghosts* (*Materialisierte Gespenster*) (1923; fig. 6) resemble tribal fetishes or voodoo dolls—a combination of childlike dolls with powerful spirits. The

45 Klee, "Creative Credo," in *His Life and Work*, 154–55: "In the past artists represented things they had seen on earth, things they liked seeing or might have liked to see. Today they reveal the relativity of visible things; they express their belief that the visible is only an isolated aspect in relation to the universe as a whole, and that other, invisible truths are the overriding factors.... By including the elements of good and evil a moral sphere is created. Evil is viewed not as an enemy whom we conquer or are conquered by, but as a force which has its share in the making of the Whole, an essential factor in creation and evolution. The presence of the masculine principle (evil, disturbing, passionate), and the feminine principle (good, serene, growing), results in the forging of an ethical balance.

"Corresponding to this is the dialectic of forms, movement and counter-movement, or—if we want to put this in more elementary terms—colorism, as in Delaunay's analysis of forms by color. Every energy calls for its complement, for art is always seeking the equilibrium that arises out of the play of forces, a state in which abstract forms can become meaningful objects, or else pure symbols as constant as numbers and letters of the alphabet. Taken all together, these may become symbols of the cosmos; that is to say, they become a form of religious expression."

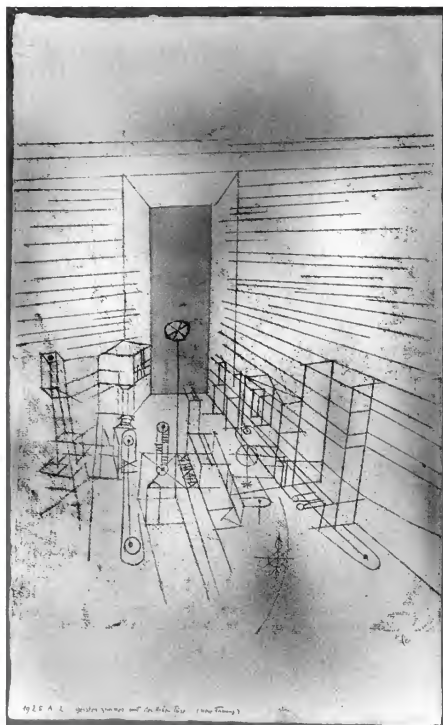


Fig. 7: Paul Klee, *Ghost Chamber with the High Door* (*New Version*) (*Geisterzimmer mit der Hohen Türe [neue Fassung]*), 1925/102. Sprayed and brushed watercolor, and transferred printing ink on paper, bordered with gouache and ink, 48.7 x 29.4 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, The Berggruen Klee Collection, 1987.455.16.

glowing colors of the fuzzy forms emerge from the dark background, suggestive of glowing spirits.

Spiritualists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sometimes explained the physical reality of ghosts as evidence of a fourth dimension existing in parallel with the first three, borrowing from the mathematic and scientific concepts that inspired avant-garde artists.⁴⁶ The astrophysicist Johann Karl Friedrich Zöllner concluded that the mysterious knots tied in loops of leather by the American medium Henry Slade proved the existence of a physical fourth dimension after a series of experiments in Leipzig in the 1870s.⁴⁷ A fascination with such concepts of higher realities was found in the futurists, German Dadaists, and

46 Lindo Dolrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidian Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983).

47 Klaus B. Stoubermann, "Tying the Knot: Skill, Judgement, and Authority in the 1870s Leipzig Spiritistic Experiments," *British Journal for the History of Science* 34, no. 1 (Mar. 2001): 67–79.



Fig. 8: Paul Klee, *Specter of a Warrior (Geist eines Kriegers)*, 1926/234. Pen on paper on cardboard, 27 x 19.4 cm, private collection.

even in the Bauhaus.⁴⁸

In the 1920s Klee created many perspective studies of interiors and architectural forms. These explore the technical and theoretical implications of representing three dimensions on a two-dimensional surface, an age-old metaphor for human understanding, from Plato's allegory of the cave to Marcel Duchamp's *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915–23).⁴⁹ These perspective studies are a perfect metaphor for the intersection of planes of reality, as highlighted in his *Ghost Chamber with the High Door (New Version)* (*Geisterzimmer mit der Hohen Türe*

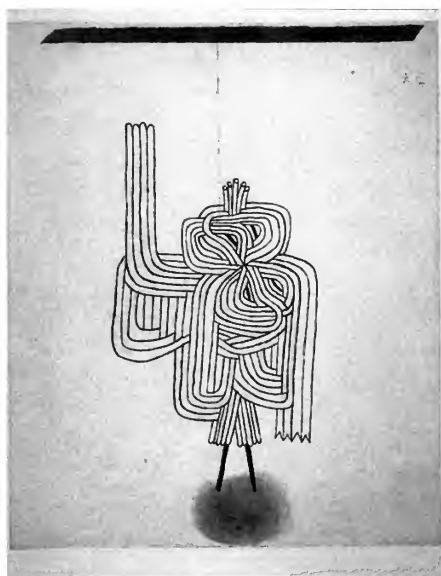


Fig. 9: Paul Klee, *Phantom's Oath (Gespenster-Schwur)*, 1930/113. Watercolor and red chalk on paper on cardboard, 47 x 37.4 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.

[*neue Fassung*]] (1925; fig. 7), and related works.⁵⁰

Klee's title is typically ambiguous and playful—is this the representation of a mundane, but haunted house, or the apparition of a room found on a ghostly plane of existence in the afterlife? Haunted interiors were often found in earlier romantic or symbolist art, such as James Ensor's etching *Haunted Furniture* of 1888. Klee's rich complexity, with implications of simultaneity and a critical study of the very tools of representation, makes his work very modern. In his "Creative Credo" he was explicit:

Formerly we used to represent things visible on earth, things we either liked to look at or would have liked to see. Today we reveal the reality that is behind visible things, thus expressing the belief that the visible world is merely an isolated case in relation to the universe and that there are many more other, latent realities. Things appear to assume a broader and more diversified meaning, often seemingly contradicting the rational experience of yesterday. There is a striving to emphasize the essential character of the accidental.⁵¹

48 See Timothy O. Benson, "Mysticism, Materialism, and the Machine in Berlin Dada," in "Mysticism and Occultism in Modern Art," ed. Linda Dalrymple Henderson, special issue, *Art Journal* 46, no. 1 (Spring 1987): 46–55. See also Osamu Okudo, "Diessseitig bin ich gar nicht fassbar" Poul Klee und die Esoterik, in *Das Bauhaus und die Esoterik*, ed. Christoph Wogner (Bielefeld: Kerber, 2005), 56–63, and Linda Dalrymple Henderson, "X Rays and the Quest for Invisible Reality in the Art of Kupko, Duchomp, and the Cubists," *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 323–40.

49 Duchomp drew the parallel between shadows and dimensions in explaining *The Large Glass*: "Since I found that one could make a cast shadow from a three-dimensional thing, any object whatsoever—just as the projecting of the sun on the earth makes two dimensions—I thought that, by simple intellectual ontology, the fourth dimension could project on object of three dimensions, or, to put it another way, any three-dimensional object, which we see dispositionately, is a projection of something four-dimensional, which we are not familiar with." Quoted in Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 133. See also Tom H. Gibbons, "Cubism and 'The Fourth Dimension' in the Context of the Late Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Revival of Occult Idealism," *Journal of the Workgroup and Courtold Institutes* 44 (1981): 130–47.

50 Related works include: *Phantom Perspective (Perspectiv-Spuk)* (1920); *The Other Ghost Chamber (new version)* [*das andere Geisterzimmer (neue Fassung)*] (1925); and *Spiritualistic Furniture (spiritistische Möbel)* (1923).

51 Klee, "Creative Credo," in *The Thinking Eye*, 78–79.

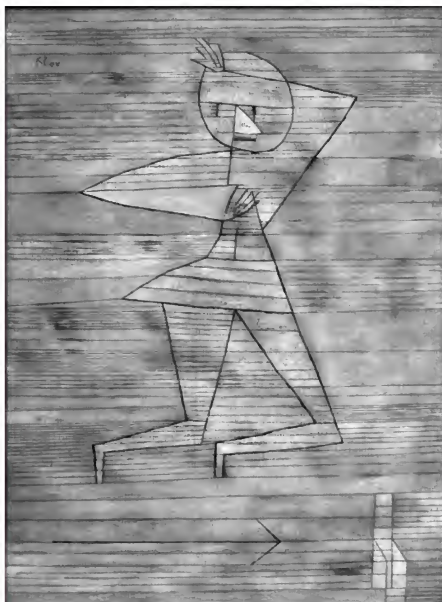


Fig. 10: Paul Klee, *Fleeing Ghost* (*fliehender Geist*), 1929/131. Oil, pen, and pencil on canvas, 89.5 x 63.5 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago, Bequest of Claire Zeisler, 1991.1500.

Klee's perspective studies highlight one of the signal advantages of the visual image over the verbal in the representation of simultaneity in space and time. At his 1924 lecture at the Jena Kunstverein he declared: "For we lack the means to discuss synthetically a multidimensional simultaneity."⁵²

GHOSTS AND MODERN MILITARISM

The carnage of war has often led to an upsurge in belief in ghosts, as bereavements on a mass scale leave so many yearning for contact with the dead. For soldiers on the front, the shock of seeing young lives snuffed out can lead to post-traumatic stress. Klee reluctantly served in the German army, although he was spared combat duty, and his later life was spent in the shadow of increasing militarism in Germany. He died in 1940, at the beginning of the Second World War. Some of his images of ghosts are reminiscent of Otto Dix's horrifying images of dead warriors. Klee's *Specter of a Warrior* (*Geist eines Kriegers*) of 1926 (fig. 8) shows the haunted face of the dead soldier, still shocked by the horrors of war. Several related works expand on this theme.⁵³

⁵² Paul Klee, "On Modern Art," (in this volume) 10.

⁵³ Related works by Klee include: *Military Spook* (*militärischer Spuk*) [1928]; *Ghost of a Warrior* (*Gespens eines Kriegers*) [1930]; and *Ghost and Followers* (*Gespens und Mitläufer*) [1930].



Fig. 11: Paul Klee, *Ragged Ghost* (*Lumpen gespenst*), 1933/465. Paste and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 48 x 33.1 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.



Fig. 12: Paul Klee, *Starving Spirits* (*hungernde Geister*), 1934/143. Pastel and oil on linen, 51 x 43.7 cm, The Art Institute of Chicago, Gift of Mrs. Tiffany Blake, 1948.15.



Fig. 13: Paul Klee, *The Soul Departs (Ent-Seelung)*, 1934/211. Mixed media, 30.5 x 49.3 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.



Fig. 14: Catalina Susana Garcia *Lifts Herself into the Ethereal*, Madrid, 1905. Spiritualist photograph, location unknown.

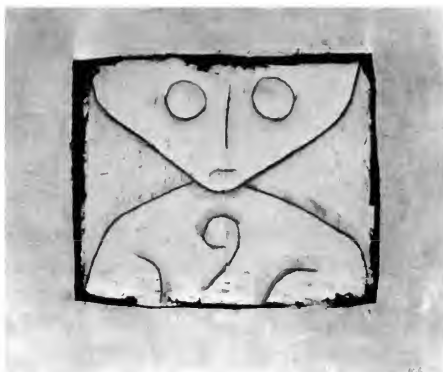


Fig. 15: Paul Klee, *Spirit of a Letter (Geist eines Briefes)*, 1937/119. Pigmented paste on newspaper, 33 x 48.6 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, NY, Purchase, 8.1939.

The stiff-armed salute of the rising German militarism is shown in *Phantom's Oath (Gespenster-Schwur)* of 1930 (fig. 9). At this point in his career, Klee was exploring intricate and labyrinthine linear patterns. It was also typical of him to combine multivalent images, and the figure may also derive from Roman sculptures of leaders in the *adlocutio* pose haranguing their troops, such as the statue *Augustus of Prima Porta*. The interwoven linear pattern evokes the drapery of classical art appear often in Klee's art, often in surprising contexts. His knowledge of classical culture was deep; he used to read Aristophanes and other ancient writers in their original language.⁵⁴ He recognized the Dionysian as well as the Apollonian character of ancient art, the rational and the irrational, the comic and tragic aspects.

The theme of escape is expressed in *Fleeing Ghost (fliehender Geist)* (1929; fig. 10); the ghost may be fleeing German Fascism as well as the bonds of earthly life. The hovering two-dimensional ghost is moving from left to right, as indicated by the angular vector shapes of his elbows and knees, and the arrow at the bottom of the page. The pattern of horizontal lines of the background resembles wood grain, and the outline drawing of the ghost is embedded in this grain, or perhaps burned into it.

Other works that seem to offer a commentary on contemporary German social and political developments include *Ragged Ghost (Lumpen gespenst)* of 1933 and *Starving Spirits (hungernde Geister)* of 1934 (figs. 11 and 12). Both depict themes of poverty and hunger, which even continue to plague ghosts in the afterlife. The famished ghosts make a good metaphor, at once both comic and bitter, for the "starving artist" who struggled in modern society. *Starving Spirits* in particular puns on the ghosts' desire for physical nourishment, symbolized by the food on the table that they cannot eat, and the lack of spiritual nourishment,

54 Gockel, "Paul Klee's Picture-Making," 419.

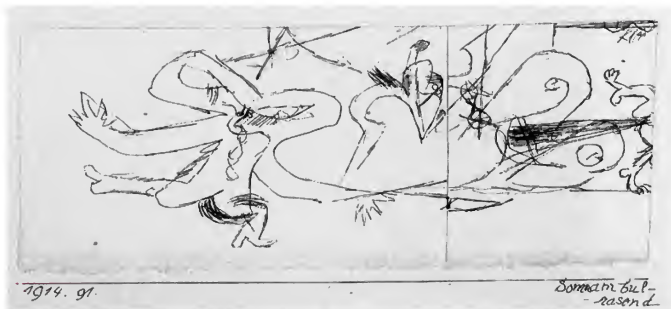


Fig. 16: Paul Klee, *Racing Somnambulist (Somnambul-rasend)*, 1914/91. Pen on paper on cardboard, 6.4 x 16.6 cm, Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern.



Fig. 17: Ebenezer Sibly (1751–99), *Animal Magnetism: The Operator Putting His Patient into a Crisis*, engraving after Dodd, 1794, in *A Key to Phisic, and the Occult Sciences* (London: Champante and Whitrow, 1795), 260.

which was curtailed in an increasingly repressive society.

Wandering souls were a favorite topic for Klee.⁵⁵ At times he portrayed the actual moment of death, when the soul leaves the body. In *The Soul Departs (Ent-Seelung)* of 1934 a recumbent

figure lies at the bottom of the work, with abstract representations of the person's soul flowering above it in abstract, deconstructed forms (fig. 13).

This juxtaposition of the formerly living body and the ethereal image of the soul departing the body was common in art influenced by spiritualism, such as Alfred Kubin's *Dying (Sterben)* of c. 1899. Spiritualist photographs had used multiple exposures to create the same effect (fig. 14). Kubin's work and such photographs are much more liter-

ally realistic than Klee's abstract rendering. Klee returned to the theme of death and dying in his late series of drawings titled *The Infernal Park (der Inferner Park)* in 1939.⁵⁶ This is one of his last series of works, created as he was increasingly ill from scleroderma, and represents stages of dying. *Ars moriendi*, the art of dying, was as relevant in the twentieth century as it had been in late Middle Ages. Spiritualists offered a message of hope, convinced of the reality of an afterlife.

Klee's witty and poignant *Spirit of a Letter (Geist eines Briefes)* (1937; fig. 15) uses the form of an envelope, which had previously conveyed a letter, to make the image of a face and shoulders inscribed upon the folds. The empty body still carries the image of the soul that had occupied it, like an envelope that still bears traces of the letter it carried.

SOMNAMBULISTS—MESMERISM AND TRANCE MEDIUMS

Ghosts inhabit another plane of existence, presumably parallel to our own. Spiritualists sought to communicate with the souls of the dead, and one of the most commonly employed techniques was to use a spirit medium who would enter into rapport with the spirits of the dead while in a trance state, transitional between sleeping and waking. Such trance states were called somnambulism, and were first exploited in the late eighteenth century by the Austrian Franz Anton Mesmer (1734–1815).⁵⁷

Klee's *Racing Somnambulist (Somnambul-rasend)* (1914; fig. 16) shows a somnambulist racing from left to right in the drawing. Klee's cynicism about such somnambulists may be indicated in the linear depiction of a figure breaking wind in the face of the distorted double of the somnambulist; this scatological detail,

⁵⁶ See Franciscano, *Paul Klee*, 316–22. See also Hans Suter, *Paul Klee and His Illness* (Basel: Karger, 2010).

⁵⁷ Carl Kiesewetter, *Franz Anton Mesmer's Leben und Lehre, Nebt einer Vorgeschichte des Mesmerismus, Hypnotismus und Somnambulismus* (Leipzig: Max Spahr, 1893). Henri F. Ellenberger, *The Discovery of the Unconscious* (New York: Basic Books, 1970) has an extremely useful overview of Mesmer and the development of hypnosis in the nineteenth century.

⁵⁵ Yvonne Scott, "Paul Klee's 'Anima Errante' in the Hugh Lane Municipal Gallery, Dublin," *Burlington Magazine* 140, no. 1146 (Sept. 1998): 615–18.



Fig. 18: A. M. S. de Puységur (1751–1825), *Mesmerically Magnetized Elm Tree*, in *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire et à l'établissement du magnétisme animal* (1784; Paris: J. G. Dentu, 1820).



“ ET MAINTENANT DORS, MA MIGNONNE ! ”

Fig. 21: George Du Maurier (1834–96), Svengali puts Trilby into a Trance (*Et maintenant dors, ma mignonne!*), in *Trilby* (London: Osgood, McIlvaine, 1895), 381.



Fig. 19: Emile Magnin (1865–1937), *Magnetized and Non-magnetized Plants* (*Plantes magnétisées, Plantes non magnétisées*), in *L'Art et l'Hypnose* (Geneva: Edition Atar, 1907), 4.



Fig. 20: Paul Klee, *Apparatus for the Magnetic Treatment of Plants* (*Apparat für magnetische Behandlung der Pflanzen*), 1921/1933. Oil transfer and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 31.6 x 48 cm, Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum, Association Fund, BR34.80.

reminiscent of Flemish and Dutch art, may have been suggested by James Ensor's 1888 etching *Witches in a Windstorm*, which features similar gassy imagery.

Inspired by Enlightenment discoveries of electromagnetism, Mesmer claimed to have discovered an invisible fluid or force, comparable to magnetism, that was intrinsic to all living beings.⁵⁸ Adepts could manipulate this vital fluid by bending it to their will (fig. 17). Individuals in mesmeric trance were also thought to be able to contact higher powers and spirits of the departed, and were alleged to be able to see inside bodies to diagnose illness. Their clairvoyance was explained by their ability to use hitherto unknown capabilities of the mind to see hidden dimensions. Mesmer's admirers included Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and Marie Antoinette.

Mesmer and his followers allegedly manipulated the invisible force fields that permeated the world, by using their willpower to focus it on humans or anything living, including plants. It was believed that the healing energies of the vital fluid (animal magnetism) could be stored in batteries and even trees through concentration of will, much as electricity is stored. People would later sit near these trees, holding wires or ropes to receive the healing energy, as shown in the illustration of a mesmerically magnetized elm tree (fig. 18). The term “magnetic somnambulism” was invented by the French mesmerist Armand Marie Jacques de Chastenet, the Marquis de Puységur, in 1784.⁵⁹ In that same year Benjamin Franklin was asked by Louis XVI to join a commission investigating the claims of the new science. The commission tested Mesmer's claims, and found no evidence that his procedures worked. Their findings did not discourage enthusiasts, how-

⁵⁸ See Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

⁵⁹ Wolffram, *Stepchildren of Science*, 47.

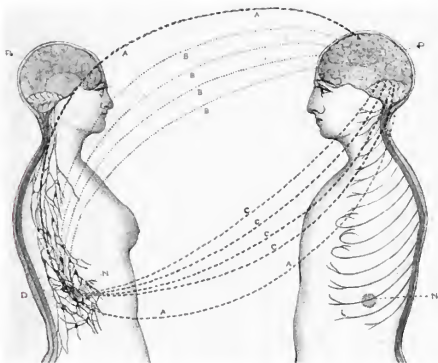


Fig. 22: G. G. Zerffi (1820–92), *Passing & Re-passing Current of Positive Electricity* (mesmerism scientifically explained), in *Spiritualism and Animal Magnetism* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1871), frontispiece.



Fig. 23: Edvard Munch (1863–1944), *Attraction*, 1896. Lithograph, 48.2 x 36.5 cm, private collection.

ever.

The pantheistic view of a continuum of living beings had been particularly important in Germany since the romantic era. Mark Roskill notes that Klee was attracted to Goethe's concepts of creation and transformation in the plant kingdom, a romantic



Fig. 24: Emile Magnin, *Scene at the Schauspielhaus in Munich, in L'Art et l'Hypnose*, 237.

Naturphilosophie that posited the unity of all living beings.⁶⁰ In 1907, the French psychic researcher Emile Magnin documented a series of experiments with mesmerizing plants and people in his book *L'Art et l'Hypnose*. One set of photos showed the positive results obtained by hypnotizing plants to make them grow (fig. 19).

Klee's watercolor *Apparatus for the Magnetic Treatment of Plants* (*Apparat für magnetische Behandlung der Pflanzen*) of 1921 recalls mesmeric experiments with trees and plants (fig. 20). A tube-like device mounted on a stand hovers over some plants, presumably focusing magnetic force on them. The apparatus towers over them, as if it were haranguing them with a loud-speaker to grow. Translucent clouds of blue and pink may suggest ethereal forces.

The susceptibility of some people to fall under the control of a mesmerist led to fears of thought-control and loss of free will. George Du Maurier's famous novel *Trilby* (1894) provided a classic example of the evil hypnotist Svengali, a sinister Jewish music teacher, who controlled the innocent Trilby, forcing her to sing beyond her ability while in a trance. His force of will controlled her and sapped her strength, eventually killing her (fig. 21).

Hypnotized individuals, called somnambulists (sleepwalkers), were thought to be under the control of the will of the hypnotizer, or mesmerist. The vulnerability of the generally female subjects of such trances had an implicit sexual theme. The British Pre-Raphaelite John Everett Millais depicted a zombie-like sleepwalker wandering the moors in his painting *The Somnambulist* (1871). The French realist Gustave Courbet portrayed a similar figure in *La Somnambule* (c. 1855).

Throughout the nineteenth century, the understanding of electromagnetism increased, and hypnotists elaborated the scientific explanations of their phenomena. For instance, in 1871 G. G.

⁶⁰ Mark Roskill, Klee, Kandinsky, and the Thought of Their Time: A Critical Perspective (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 99: "Klee had been attracted to Goethe's ideas on the formative processes of creation as early as 1914—particularly as they were expressed in the 1790 essay 'On the Metamorphoses of Plants.'"

Zerffi published a highly technical explanation of hypnosis in his book *Spiritualism and Animal Magnetism* (fig. 22).⁶¹ The reciprocal bonding between hypnotist and subject, generally male and female, appears in a less scientific context in Edvard Munch's lithograph *Attraction* (1896; fig. 23).

The power of hypnotic trance to release hidden artistic abilities became the subject of popular entertainments and pseudo-scientific experiments. In 1904 an untrained and hypnotized dancer, Madeleine Guipet, performed at the Schauspielhaus in Munich (fig. 24).⁶² The performance was organized by Albert von Schrenck-Notzing, and noted artists Franz von Stuck and Albert von Keller were among those attending. Keller made at least twenty paintings of her in the midst of her somnambulant dance. One of these, *Dream Dancer Madeleine G. in Munich, 1904*, was published in *Psychische Studien* in April 1921.⁶³

Klee's *Somnambulant Dancer (Somnambule Tänzerin)* (1921; fig. 25) shows a figure in a coffin-like cabinet, and another dancing, like a puppet on strings, which are visible above her hands. The puppet dancer seems to be at the control of an unseen Svengali-like maestro. *Dance, Monster to my Soft Song! (Tanze Du Ungeheuer zu meinem sanften Lied!)* (1922; fig. 26) shows a colossal monster dancing in the air while a small figure of a woman holding a tambourine cranks a player piano below. Music and the will of the controlling human force the monster to do her bidding.

Later in the nineteenth century, hypnosis developed as a healing tool for hysteria as well as a spiritualist practice. World War I left many soldiers suffering from shell shock, or post-traumatic stress as we now call it.⁶⁴ The German military used hypnosis as one method to treat these unfortunates; the neurologist Max Nonne alone treated over 1,600 soldiers with hypnosis.⁶⁵ Toward the end of the war, popular demonstrations of hypnotism also began "sprouting up like mushrooms from the earth."⁶⁶

The susceptibility of hypnotized subjects to respond to and obey the commands of the hypnotizer led to fears of complete loss of free will. If one fell under the influence of a sinister hyp-

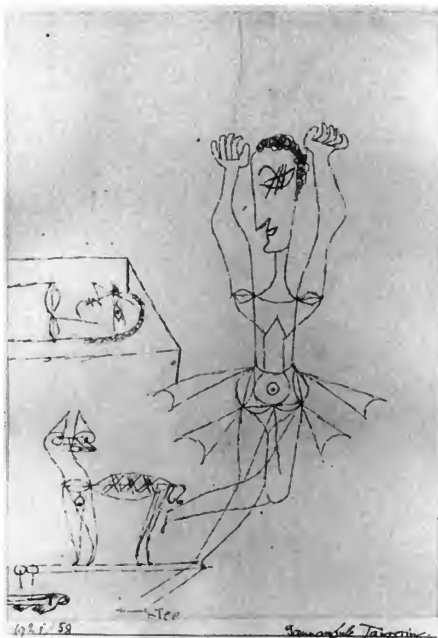


Fig. 25: Paul Klee, *Somnambulant Dancer (Somnambule Tänzerin)*, 1921/58. Pen on paper on cardboard, 24.1 x 16.3 cm, location unknown.

notizer, the subject would be helpless. The 1920 German film directed by Robert Wiene, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (*Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari*) recalls both coffins and the spirit cabinets of trance mediums. The hapless hypnotic subject Cesare (played by Conrad Veidt) is kept in a trance, only awakened sufficiently to tell the future in a traveling sideshow. He is forced to obey the hypnotist Dr. Caligari, even to commit crimes.

Women were considered particularly sensitive to contacts with the other world, and although this at times made them vulnerable, it also offered opportunities for status and power that were denied them through traditional religions. Women such as Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, and Mary Baker Eddy became leaders of large movements.⁶⁷ Spiritualism had many adherents among aristocrats, such as Baron Carl du Prel and Baron von Schrenck-Notzing, but also provided leadership opportunities for self-made individuals.⁶⁸ There is nothing as democratic as death,

61 G. G. Zerffi, *Spiritualism and Animal Magnetism: A Treatise on Dreams, Second Sight, Somnambulism, Magnetic Sleep, Spiritual Manifestations, Hallucinations, and Spectral Visions* (London: Robert Hardwicke, 1871): "Let P be the positive pole of the magnetizer; the electric animal fluid, C, will stream out from it, affecting P in the magnetized, depressing her cerebral functions to D (the plexus Satoris) and N, the negative pole; from thence the negative electric fluid, B, will be set into motion and stream towards P in the magnetizer, by which means a continuous stream of electricity, A, will be created, communicating the thoughts of the magnetizer to the magnetized." Donzker and Bott, *Séance*, 22.

62 Von Schrenck-Notzing, "Albert von Keller," 209. See also Donzker and Bott, *Séance*, 72; the pointing is illustrated on page 73. Albert von Schrenck-Notzing published a book on her: *Die Trumtänzerin Magdoleine G., Eine psychologische Studie über Hypnose und dramatische Kunst* (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1904). See also: Magnin, *L'Art et l'Hypnose*.

64 In Germany alone, 613,047 soldiers were treated for nervous disorders acquired at the front. See Doris Kaufmann, "Science as Cultural Practice: Psychiatry in the First World War and Weimar Germany," *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, no. 1 (Jun. 1999): 125-44.

65 Paul Lerner, "Hysterical Cures: Hypnosis, Gender and Performance in World War I and Weimar Germany," *History Workshop Journal* 45 (Spring 1998): 79-101. See also Kaufmann, "Science as Cultural Practice," 125-44.

66 Lerner, "Hysterical Cures," 88.

67 Alex Owen, *The Dorkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004). See also: Ann Broude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001).

68 For the aristocratic interest in spiritualism, see J. Trygve Hos-Ellison, "Nobles, Modernism, and the Culture of *fin-de-siècle* Munich," *German History* 26, no. 1 (2008): 1-23. For the socialist perspective, see Logie Barrow, "Socialism in Eternity: The Ideology of Plebeian Spiritualists, 1853-1913,"

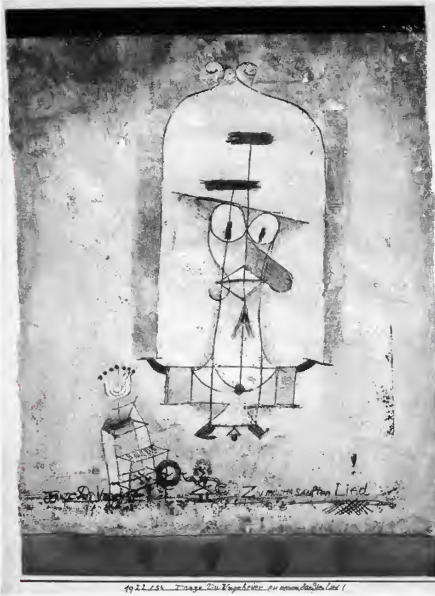


Fig. 26: Paul Klee, *Dance, Monster to my Soft Song!* (*Tanze Du Ungeheuer zu meinem sanften Lied!*), 1922/54. Watercolor and oil transfer drawing on plaster-primed gauze, 44.9 x 32.6 cm, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, NY.

after all.

Female power made some men uneasy. In his tale "The Sandman," the German romantic author E. T. A. Hoffmann expressed the fear of being manipulated by external forces. The character Nathaniel fears he has been possessed by Coppelius, a daemon in human form, who created a mechanical automaton in female shape named Olympia to lure him from his beloved Clara. Nathaniel is powerless to resist the charms of the deceptive Olympia, and he fears this is a revelation of how all free will is an illusion:

Everything, the whole of life, had become for him a dream and a feeling of foreboding; he spoke continually of how each of us, thinking himself free, was in reality the tortured playing-of mysterious powers: resistance was vain; we had humbly to submit to the decrees of fate. He went so far as to assert that it was folly to think the creations of art and science the product of our own free will: the inspiration which alone made creation possible did not proceed from within us but was effectuated by



Fig. 27: Paul Klee, *The Twittering Machine* (*Die Zwitscher-Maschine*), 1922/151. Oil transfer drawing, watercolor, and ink on paper with gouache and ink borders on board, 64.1 x 48.3 cm, The Museum of Modern Art, NY, Purchase, 564.1939.

some higher force from outside.⁶⁹

As Sigmund Freud recognized, there is something uncanny about sexual attraction,⁷⁰ and this effect is particularly heightened when the object of desire is a robot. The director Fritz Lang recognized this when he created a simulacrum of a female in his film *Metropolis* of 1927. A similar female robot was created by the magician Edison in Villiers de l'Isle Adam's 1884 novel *L'Ève Future* (*Tomorrow's Eve*).⁷¹ Thomas Edison was considered a kind of sorcerer in the popular imagination, and was the inspiration for the French author.

Automata, or mechanical beings, have been constructed since the time of ancient Greece, but they became particularly sophisticated in eighteenth-century France. Many of these were

⁶⁹ E. T. A. Hoffmann, "The Sandman," in *Tales of Hoffmann* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1982), 103.

⁷⁰ Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919), in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 218–52.

⁷¹ Villiers de l'Isle Adam, *Tomorrow's Eve* [*L'Ève Future*], trans. Robert Martin Adams (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2001). See also Asti Hustvedt, "Science Fictions: The Future Eves of Villiers de l'Isle Adam and Jean-Martin Charcot," in *The Decadent Reader: Fiction, Fantasy, and Perversion from Fin-de-Siècle France*, ed. Asti Hustvedt (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 498–518.

T. A. EDISON.
PHONOGRAPH DOLL.
No. 456,301. Patented July 21, 1891.

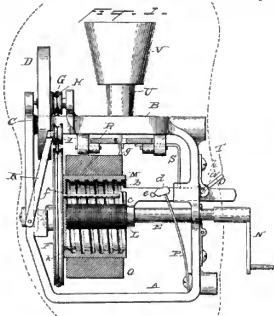


Fig. 28: Thomas Edison (1847–1931). Phonograph Doll. US Patent 456,301, filed July 30, 1890, and issued July 21, 1891.

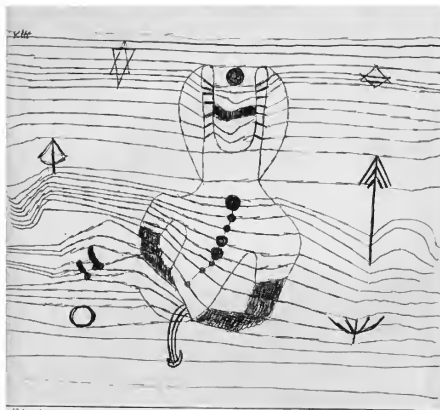


Fig. 30: Paul Klee, *Rider Unhorsed and Bewitched* (*Abgeworfener und verhexte Reiter*), 1920/62. Pen on paper on cardboard, 19.4 x 21.3 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, The Berggruen Klee Collection, 1987.315.21.

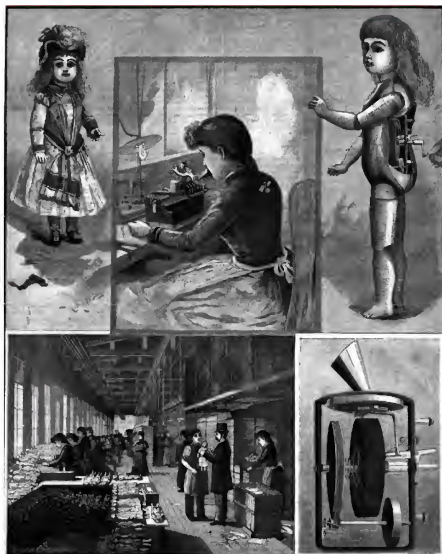


Fig. 29: Thomas Edison, *The Manufacture of Edison's Talking Doll*, *Scientific American* 62, no. 17 (Apr. 26, 1890): 257.

designed to play music, such as the female dulcimer player acquired by Marie Antoinette in 1785.⁷² The Bauhaus experiments in theater promoted an aesthetic that seemed based on the

72 The female musician, wearing an elegant dress, sits before the dulcimer, and seems to play it with moving arms. The works were made by Peter Kintzing and the cabinet by David Roentgen (in collection of Musée Nationale des Arts et Métiers, Paris).

automata, self-motivated machines.⁷³

The eerie effect of such musical automata is suggested in Klee's *The Twittering Machine* (*Die Zwitscher-Maschine*) (1922; fig. 27). The birds are trapped on a diabolical hurdy-gurdy, powered by a crank with a handle at left. When the crank is turned, the birds must sing. Although it might seem comical, the birds are captive and suggest comparison to artists who must entertain on command. The mechanism of this device resembles the interior construction of real mechanical toys that spoke or played music, such as Thomas Edison's Talking Doll, which was manufactured in 1890 (figs. 28 and 29). The long Swiss and Bavarian tradition of making mechanical birds for cuckoo clocks was also certainly a factor, and the title puns on the term for the Swiss dialect, *Switzerdeutsch*.

Sometimes the artist was considered to be a kind of vessel for external forces to manifest themselves. Surrealist artists sought contact with the unconscious for artistic inspiration through processes thought to circumvent the conscious mind, such as automatic writing and experiments with chance effects. These were based on practices of trance mediums who had used automatic writing to transmit the messages of spirits since the nineteenth century. Klee was named in André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* of 1924, and his work was reproduced in *La Révolution Surréaliste*.⁷⁴ Art and the creative process seemed to tap into higher forces, and Klee himself could be surprised by what he drew. When he entered the *Zwischenwelt* (in-between world) of art, he sometimes felt that he was not fully in command; rather that he was possessed by artistic creativity. As he wrote, "My hand is completely the tool of

73 Juliet Koss, "Bauhaus Theater of Human Dolls," *Art Bulletin* 85, no. 4 (Dec. 2003): 724–45.

74 Franciscono, *Paul Klee*, 277.



Fig. 31: Paul Klee, *Brewing Witches (brauende Hexen)*, 1922/12. Oil transfer and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 32 x 27.5 cm, Neue Nationalgalerie, Berlin.

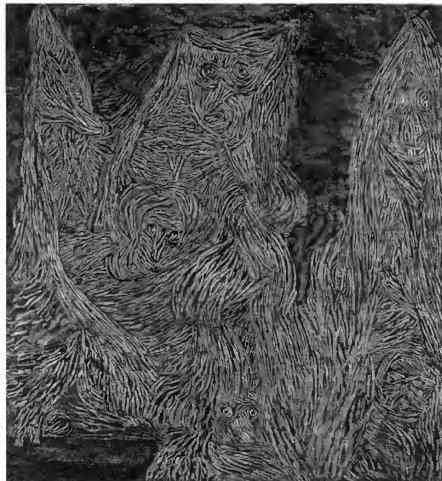


Fig. 33: Paul Klee, *Witches' Sabbath (Walpurgis nacht)*, 1935/121. Gouache on cloth laid on wood support, 72.5 x 68.2 cm, Tate, London, Purchased 1964, T00669.

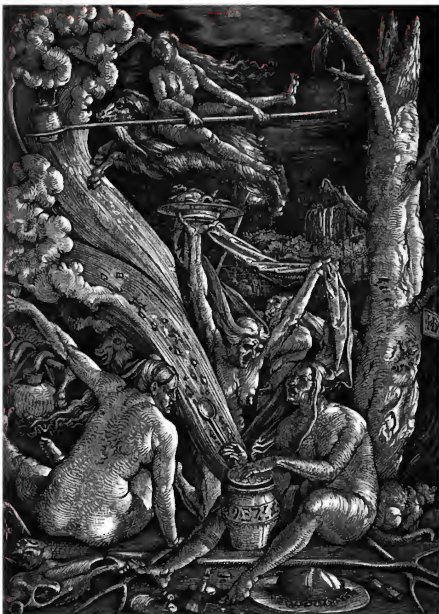


Fig. 32: Hans Baldung Grien (c. 1484-1545), *Witches' Sabbath*, 1520. Chiaroscuro woodcut, 37.5 x 25.4 cm, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Fund in memory of Horatio Greenough Curtis, 27.1293.

a remote sphere."⁷⁵

WITCHES AND ENCHANTMENT

Even before Mesmer and sinister hypnotists, there were legends of witches and magicians who consorted with daemons and used dark forces to control others. Many of Klee's works feature magic and witches, and they frequently look back to historical images made during the widespread belief in witchcraft in the late Middle Ages and early modern period. *Rider Unhorsed and Bewitched (Abgeworfener und verhexter Reiter)* evokes the image of a knight thrown from his horse while under the spell of a witch (fig. 30). Klee's *The Witch with a Comb (Die Hexe mit dem Kamm)* (1922; plate 31), created while he was at the Bauhaus in Weimar, shows a somewhat comical image of a witch with a tall Spanish-style comb. Her stern demeanor combines vanity and menace, and her hands are replaced by downward pointing arrows. This work was produced as part of a portfolio by various artists who donated their works to the German museum of the book in Leipzig.⁷⁶

Witches often employed potions to effect their spells, and Klee's *Brewing Witches (brauende Hexen)* (1922; fig. 31) shows witches gathered around a cauldron, with the large number seven hovering over it. Seven was believed to have mystical significance in many traditions. The scene of seated witches brewing up a spell recalls Hans Baldung Grien's 1520 image

⁷⁵ Quoted in Werkmeister, *The Making of Paul Klee's Career*, 180-81.

⁷⁶ *Künstlerspende für das Deutsche Buchmuseum* (Leipzig: Deutsche Verein für Buchwesen und Schrifttum, 1922).



Fig. 34: Paul Klee, *Spellbound Lightning (Gebannter Blitz)*, 1927/249. Watercolor on paper on cardboard, 44.2 x 29.8 cm, Albertina, Vienna.



Fig. 35: Hans Vintler (fl. 1407-19), *Witch Using a Bone to Summon a Hailstorm* (woodcut), in *The Book of Virtue (Das Buch der Tugend)* (Augsburg: Johann Blaubirer, 1486), 313. Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

of the Witches' Sabbath, where a group of witches sit around a cauldron while some fly through the air (fig. 32). Klee's painting *Witches' Sabbath (Walpurgis nacht)* (1935; fig. 33) even



Fig. 36: Georges Demeny (1850-1917), [*Fencer*], 1906. Gelatin silver print, 17.5 x 26.5 cm, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, Purchase, Alfred Stieglitz Society Gifts, 2010.1.

echoes the linear pattern of Baldung Grien's chiaroscuro woodcut. Klee's linear patterns are extremely varied, and here create an effect of shimmering vibration that seems analogous to the ethereal spirits, a kind of spiritual synaesthesia, evoking a higher plane of existence through equivalent visual marks.

Sometimes the spells were directed at individuals, as was alleged in the Salem witch trials, and as seen in Klee's *Rider Unhorsed and Bewitched* (fig. 30). Other times the spells were used to bring general misfortune, often through lightning and hailstorms to ruin crops. Klee's *Spellbound Lightning (Gebannter Blitz)* (1927; fig. 34) echoes many early tales and images of witches summoning storms, as in a 1486 illustration (fig. 35). Witches were symbols of disruption and chaos in the late Middle Ages. The orderly fabric of the city and society is threatened by the jagged bolt of black lightning, which also cuts through the unsteady ladder supporting an individual teetering on the fragment, about to fall.

Clairvoyance and the power of witches to cast spells at long distance were pre-modern forms of simultaneity, and this is part of their attraction for Klee. Instantaneity and the superimposition of moving forms fascinated Klee. Discussing his 1929 work *Jester in a State of Trance (Narr in Trance)*, Klee once remarked to his students: "The jester in a state of trance might be taken as an example of superimposed instant views of movement."⁷⁷ Klee was fascinated with movement and the temporal element of art. In his "Creative Credo" he wrote:

All becoming is based on movement. In Lessing's *Laocoön*, on which we wasted a certain amount of intellectual effort in our younger days, a good deal of fuss is made about the difference between temporal and spatial art. But on closer scrutiny the fuss turns out to be mere learned foolishness. For space itself is a temporal concept.

⁷⁷ Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 130.

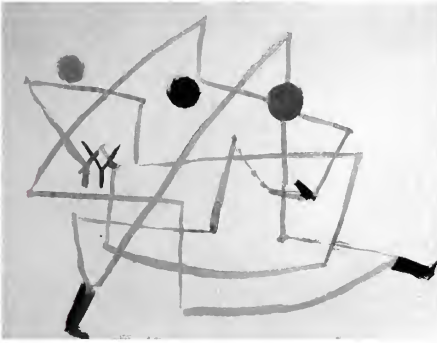


Fig. 37: Paul Klee, *Bewitched and in a Hurry* (*verhext und eilig*), 1933/62. Watercolor on paper, 49 x 63 cm, private collection.

...The space in which we move belongs to time, character belongs to movement. Only the dead point is timeless.⁷⁸

Klee emphasized the temporal element in creating a work of art, and in perceiving it. It takes time to create it and time to perceive it. He approvingly quoted the philosopher Feuerbach who observed that a chair is needed to properly appreciate a work of art.

The study of movement and a reconsideration of the role of time in art was one of the hallmarks of early modernism. Klee shared this interest with Marcel Duchamp and the Italian futurists. They were in turn inspired by late nineteenth-century efforts to develop a method of photographing movements over time, combining various stages of movement in one image. Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey were the leaders in the discovery of this chronophotography. Georges Demeny was Marey's principal assistant who helped him develop his method in the 1880s. After Marey's death he continued to make studies of athletes. His chronophotograph of a fencer (fig. 36) makes a good comparison to Klee's *Bewitched and in a Hurry* (*verhext und eilig*) (1933; fig. 37). Klee's work shows both repeated circles indicating the positions of the head as the figure moves, and swooping lines suggest continuous and rapid motion. The angle of the boots almost suggests a military goose-step march, and this may be another work which relates to the growing militarism in Germany at the time. Klee's drawing *Militarism of Witches* (*militarismus der Hexen*) completes the link between the rise of totalitarianism and a witch's curse (1933; plate 52). A witch beats a drum over the body of a fallen victim, while a troop marches in unison, like sleepwalkers, in the background. The nervous line suggests a rapid beat of the drum and pace of the marchers. Although theosophy and Freemasonry were banned by the Nazis, many have noted the predilection for the occult

among the leaders of National Socialism in Germany.⁷⁹ In 1933 Klee was dismissed from his teaching position at the Academy in Düsseldorf under pressure from the Nazis, who considered the freedom and imagination inherent in Klee's art to be dangerous. His dismissal was hailed in the right-wing journal *Deutsche Kultur-Wacht*.⁸⁰ His stubborn individualism was not to be tolerated in the new society.

Magic was a rich metaphor for the creative process, suggesting explanations for the power of art and the source of inspiration. The artist, like a magician or witch, employed symbols to create effects that he only partly understood. Klee's exploration of hidden realities led him to both modernist and primitive concerns, and besides the ghosts, mesmerists, and witches that this essay has discussed, his imagery includes daemons, nature spirits, devils, monsters, fairy tales, and magic. These pre-modern legends gave him material for satire and allegory, and served as keys for him to delve into the nature of reality—they were metaphors for his artistic quest. Combining these archaic themes with abstract form, Klee made a striking new synthesis. Klee's studio was often compared to a magician's workshop. His art defies categorization, and he noted that it was not for everyone:

There where the central organ of all temporal-spatial animatedness, whether we call it the brain or the heart of Creation, occasions all the functions: who as an artist would not want to dwell there? In the womb of nature, in the primal ground of Creation, which holds the secret key to everything that is?

But not everyone should head there! Each person should move in the domain where the beat of his heart tells him he should move.⁸¹ ■

78 Klee, "Creative Credo," in *The Thinking Eye*, 78.

79 G. L. Mosse, "The Mystical Origins of National Socialism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 22, no. 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1961): 81-96. Corinna Treitel points out that the historical connections between National Socialism and occultism in Germany actually have a wide spectrum, from belief to hostility, in Treitel, *A Science for the Soul*, 210-42.

80 Robert Scholz, *Deutsche Kultur-Wacht*, no. 10 (1933): 5. Quoted in Peter Adam, *Art of the Third Reich* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1992), 65. Adam quotes Scholz: "The fact that Paul Klee and Edwin Scharff have been dismissed, from the academies in Berlin and Düsseldorf by our Minister of Culture is an important step on the road to liberation from fourteen years of the enslavement of German art by alien elements...the fact that one once considered Paul Klee a great artist will be seen by future generations as a sign of a complete spiritual sellout... We do not reject the modernists because they are modern but because they are spiritually destructive."

81 Klee, "On Modern Art," 14.

Stephen H. Watson

The Sublime Continuum: Klee's Cosmic Simultaneities

The formal has to fuse with the *Weltanschauung*.

—Paul Klee¹

When our experience has turned into a real process in a real world and our phenomenal time has spread itself out over this world and assumed a cosmic dimension, we are not satisfied with replacing the continuum by the exact concept of the real number, in spite of the essential and undeniable inexactness arising from what is given.... Here we discover genuine reason which lays bare the *Logos* dwelling in reality (just as purely as is possible for this consciousness which cannot "leap over its own shadow").

—Hermann Weyl²

The graphic universe consists of light and shadow.... We investigate the formal for the sake of expression and the insight into our soul which are thereby provided.

—Paul Klee³

Christian Geelhaar noted that Klee's polyphonic principle of creation "moves like a *Leitmotiv* through a large part of the artist's work in the early thirties, but also appears later on."⁴ When most explicit, it perhaps best reveals the complicated syntax and semantics that make up the ironic depths of Klee's work. Through them, he articulated the work of art as an event in "cosmological" space and time whose ontological tensions were not readily resolved. Klee's concern with the polyphonic also elaborates its own retrograde effect: an interest in the relation between music and graphic art that began as early as 1905. In one of his most important diary entries, dating from July 1917, this concern yielded a claim regarding the superiority of graphic art to music. Its assertion, as ever in Klee, was not lacking in irony. Written while he was working in a military payroll department, his account begins by acknowledging its own connection to the world: "Thoughts at the open window for the payroll department."⁵ The superiority of the graphic arts, Klee stated, derives from the fact that "here the time element becomes spatial. The notion of simultaneity [*Gleichzeitigkeit*] stands out even

1 Paul Klee, *The Diaries of Paul Klee, 1898–1918*, ed. Felix Klee (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), #1081.

2 Hermann Weyl, *The Continuum: A Critical Examination of the Foundation of Analysis*, trans. Stephen Pollard and Thomas Bole (Lanham, MD: Thomas Jefferson University Press, 1987), 93.

3 Klee, *Diaries*, #1081.

4 Christian Geelhaar, *Paul Klee and the Bauhaus* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973), 133.

5 Klee, *Diaries*, #1081.

more richly.⁶ Still, as dense as it is rich, in tying together a number of elements in Klee's work, the entry leaves one grappling for its significance. The discussion of simultaneity emerges in this entry as part of Klee's passage beyond the optical—the visible—to the invisible:

The real truth, to begin with, remains invisible, beneath the surface. The colors that captivate are not lighting but light. The graphic universe consists of light and shadow. The diffused clarity of slightly overcast weather is richer in phenomena than a sunny day. A thin stratum of cloud just before the stars break through. It is difficult to catch and represent this, because the moment is so fleeting. It has to penetrate our soul. The formal has to fuse with the *Weltanschauung*.⁷

The simultaneous is not the momentary; it is not the instantaneous. The occurrence of the momentary, simple motion, Klee states, "strikes us as banal" (*kommt uns banal vor*). Klee joins those like Benjamin and Gadamer in rejecting the instantaneousness of modern "optical" sensation as a narrowing of experience (*Erfahrung*).⁸ It is true, as Hans Robert Jauss aptly demonstrated in their wake, that the modern emphasis upon perception, from impressionism onward, had dehierarchized the ancient analogies (and ideologies) of reality.⁹ But the experience of instantaneous sensation that resulted also readily succumbed to the Weberian diagnosis of modern disenchantment, spurred on by an instrumental rationality devoid of transcendence. As Weber's student Georg Lukács had put it, the experience that accompanies modern life is that of a world devoid of essence, immanence, and homeland—an impenetrable world the writer can articulate only ironically.¹⁰ But we perhaps should not limit such considerations to the moral at the expense of the scientific. There is perhaps also no little irony in Einstein's turn to Hume's skepticism concerning empiricism to overcome Mach's need to immanently link time to sensation. Here, too, simultaneity would require more than the instantaneous conjunction of impressionist points. If modern confidence regarding the evidence of sensation had seemed incontestable, its phenomenologies of perception would need to part company with such supposed immanence.

Klee further details the musical figure at stake here. Polyphony in music "helped to some extent to satisfy this need. A quintet as in *Don Giovanni* is closer to us than the epic motion in *Tristan*."¹¹

Klee found Mozart and Bach more modern than the music of the nineteenth century. These were not epic times—any more than the simultaneity he explored involved an epic event answering to a simple act or an enactment. Polyphony's formal simultaneity of independent themes escapes such simplistic or univocal reductions. Even so, the superiority of the graphic line, Klee held, was clear. "If in music, the time element could be overcome by a retrograde motion [Rückwärtsbewegung] that would penetrate consciousness, then a renaissance might still be thinkable."¹² But without it the musical (like the literary) work of art remains bound to the dispersions of succession, falling short of the cosmic dimension Klee privileged in the graphic.

"That everything is transitory is merely a simile,"¹³ Klee began. In some sense, "everything is polyphonic" must be too. Despite his interest in the link between music and his art, here the thesis is that music fails. And so does its paradigm, the temporality of musical simultaneity. The notion that the first note of a musical work anticipates the last (and the last contains the first) is often invoked as the model of iterable identity. Still, Klee claims it falls short of graphic simultaneity, which retains the "retrograde motion" explicitly. And, it is already clear that Klee's point is by no means a simple one. The retrograde motion is not a simple accompaniment of musical identity.

No more than any other concept, the concept of polyphony is not self-sufficient. Klee is not simply a musical painter even if he often uses this medium as a model, one not without ironic implications.

There is polyphony in music. In itself the attempt to transpose it into art would offer no special interest. But to gather insights into music through the special character of polyphonic works, to penetrate deep into this cosmic sphere, to issue forth a transformed beholder of art, and then to lurk in waiting for these things in the picture, that is something more. For the simultaneity of several independent themes is something that is possible not only in music; typical things in general do not belong just in one place but have their roots and organic anchor everywhere and anywhere.¹⁴

Such ironic simultaneity is more than a set of "independent musical themes." Nor is it simply limited to art. Here perhaps we find a first inkling of why the *Diaries'* considerations on simultaneity note the importance of Robert Delaunay. But here, too, it is not so simple. Klee's explicit reference is again a musical one: "Delaunay strove to shift the accent in art onto the time element, after the fashion of a fugue, by choosing formats that could not be encompassed in one glance."¹⁵ For Klee, Delaunay's simultaneity

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 127; Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller," in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 83–109.

9 Hans Robert Jauss, *Aesthetic Experience and Literary Hermeneutics*, trans. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), 73f.

10 See Georg Lukács, *The Theory of the Novel*, trans. Anna Bostock (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1971), 36–37.

11 Klee, *Diaries*, #1081.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Paul Klee, *Notebooks, Volume 1: The Thinking Eye*, 5th ed., ed. Jürg Spiller, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Lund Humphries, 1978), 296.

15 Klee, *Diaries*, #1081.

neither dissolves time nor reduces the rhythms of its distention into an encompassing glance or vision. Strictly taken, Klee states, it involves a work that is *Unübersehbar*.

Now Klee's proximity to Delaunay's own account of simultaneity at this point is clear. Klee had translated Delaunay's "Light" (1912) into German in *Der Sturm*.¹⁶ While we will need to ultimately parse their differences, many of the themes of Klee's writings seem to be found there in lineament: the rhythmic simultaneity of the work of art, the need to free the line, the emphasis on vision, detachment from the object, description, the literary, mimesis, and, throughout, the emphasis upon the harmony of nature.¹⁷

Constance Naubert-Riser has noted that Klee's translations not only edited Delaunay's work into paragraphs, but involved a "personal interpretation" emphasizing "the autonomy of the work viewed as an organism," an emphasis reflecting his own account of the work as a dialogue between self and world.¹⁸ For Delaunay, impressionism had been the birth of light in painting, making possible a new encounter with Nature:

Impressionism is the birth of Light in painting—
Light reaches us through our perception
Without visual perception, there is no light, no
movement.
Light in Nature creates color-movement
Movement is provided by relationships of
uneven measures,
Of color contrast among themselves that
make up Reality.
This reality is endowed with Depth (we see as
far as the stars) and thus
becomes rhythmic simultaneity.
Simultaneity in light is the harmony, the color
rhythms which
give birth to Man's sight.¹⁹

Georges Seurat divided the color of an object, splitting the color into its component parts. Here he followed the laws of simultaneous contrast first articulated by Michel Eugène Chevreul's 1839 *De la loi du contraste simultané des couleurs*.²⁰ Geelhaar notes that some of Klee's polyphonic paintings still depend on this technique.²¹ But its importance for Delaunay (and Klee) was never simply technical. As Delaunay put it, "Seurat did not have the audacity to push composition to the point of breaking with

all the conventional methods of painting. In his works there is the retinal image, the image in the popular sense of imagery."²²

Guillaume Apollinaire's reviews of Delaunay's 1912 paintings, also appearing in *Der Sturm*, claimed that their visual accomplishment through the fusion of the entire canvas with light became the painterly embodiment of poetic transcendence. Delaunay had said, "We are no longer dealing here either with effect (neopressionism within impressionism), or with objects (cubism within impressionism), or with images (the physics of impressionism within impressionism)." Rather, simultaneous contrast is not only "the most powerful means to express reality," but "a purely expressive art."²³ Apollinaire commented, "simultaneity alone is creation." Even more, alluding to the contrast between eternal and finite temporality he stated, "simultaneity is life itself, and in whatever order the elements of a work succeed each other, leads to an ineluctable death; but the creator knows only eternity."²⁴

Thereafter Apollinaire and Delaunay entered into an artistic and conceptual conversation that impacted one another's painting and poetry but also Klee's own conceptual and artistic work, as this diary entry evidences.²⁵ Delaunay prophesied that in the demise of cubism the *métier* of simultaneity would thus provide, like the universality of its reality, an aesthetic of all the crafts: "furnishings, dresses, books, posters, sculpture, etc."²⁶

But how is Klee's work related to what Delaunay was calling "simultaneism" and perhaps "cubism" in general? Excellent books have been written on the topic.²⁷ What is theoretically germane here is a conceptual debate internal to general interpretations of cubism. Interpretations of simultaneity in cubism are often divided. Some see in it the construction of independent objects based on a multiplicity of profiles (a Kantian interpretation) while others see in it a simultaneity of experienced sequences (à la Bergson, who, not incidentally, showed some interest in cubism and considered writing about it).²⁸ The division expressed in these two interpretations not only has ancient conceptual roots, but also is not without effect in contemporary debates on time and objectivity. It resonates even in the most significant philosophical debates on these issues, for example, that concerning the "Continental divide" between Ernst Cassirer and Martin Heidegger.²⁹

²² Delaunay and Delaunay, *Art of Color*, 52.

²³ *Ibid.*, 92.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁵ See Kathryn Porter Aichele, "Paul Klee's Compositions with Windows: An Homage and on Elegy," in *The Pictured Word: Word and Image Interactions 2*, ed. M. Heusser, C. Cluver, L. Hoek, and L. Weingarden (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), 109–120.

²⁶ Delaunay and Delaunay, *Art of Color*, 48.

²⁷ See, for example, Jim M. Jordan, *Poul Klee and Cubism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

²⁸ See, for example, the discussions of Robert Mark Antliff, "Bergson and Cubism: A Reassessment," *Art Journal* 47, no. 4 (Winter 1988): 341–48; Paul Crowther, "Cubism, Kant, and Ideology," *Word and Image* 3, no. 2 (Apr.–June 1987): 195–201; J. M. Nash, "The Nature of Cubism: A Study of Conflicting Interpretations," *Art History* 3, no. 4 (Dec. 1980): 435–47. Antliff notes that Bergson tentatively agreed to write a preface to *Lo Section d'Or* exhibition of 1912 ("Bergson and Cubism," 341). Put otherwise, ot stake in this debate is the classical interpretation of experience as a factual event (*Erebnis*) versus its systematic exposition and construction (*Erfahrung*).

²⁹ See Peter E. Gordon, *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Dovos*

¹⁶ Robert Delaunay, "Über das Licht," trans. Poul Klee, *Der Sturm* 3, nos. 144–45 (Jan. 1913): 255–56.

¹⁷ Robert and Sonia Delaunay, *The New Art of Color: The Writings of Robert and Sonia Delaunay*, trans. David Shapiro and Arthur A. Cohen (New York: Viking, 1978), 81–83.

¹⁸ See Constance Naubert-Riser, *La création chez Paul Klee* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1978), 60–61. Pierre Francostel notes that Delaunay's original text was closely related to contemporary poetry. See Delaunay and Delaunay, *Art of Color*, 145.

¹⁹ Delaunay and Delaunay, *Art of Color*, 81.

²⁰ See Sherry A. Buckberrough, *Robert Delaunay: The Discovery of Simultaneity* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Research Press, 1982), 103.

²¹ Geelhaar, *Klee and the Bouhous*, 141.

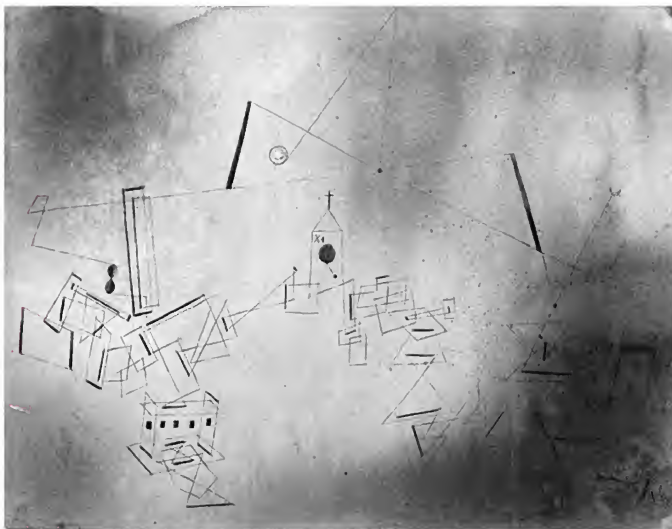


Fig. 1: Paul Klee (1879–1940), *Cosmic and Earthly Time* (*kosmische und irdische Zeit*), 1927/285. Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper, mounted on cardboard, 41.1 x 49.8 cm, Philadelphia Museum of Art, The Louise and Walter Arensberg Collection, 950.134-117.

Delaunay's "orbic" cubism is often (both historically and conceptually) linked to Bergson. Picasso's cubism is seen as more Kantian, especially by those comparing him with Einstein, stressing his transformation of the perspectivism of post-Renaissance art (though such claims were also made by Apollinaire of Delaunay).³⁰ Suffice it to say that, here as elsewhere, when it came to matters of form, Klee kept his options open, defending intuition even as he developed the famous Bauhaus constructivist theories that were received, with a nod toward Newton, as the *Principia Aesthetica* of the modern age.³¹

Moreover, as has become evident, his attachment to the musical analogue was also mixed. If in the diary entry cited above he explicitly cites Delaunay's fugue suggestion, Delaunay himself already abandoned the musical analogy. He did so probably after reading Leonardo's treatise that had claimed a certain superiority for painting over the finitude afflicting the inner coherence of music. In music "the fact of giving the parts separately in successive time prevents the memory from perceiving harmony."³² Here,

too, Klee seemingly followed him. But if this returns us to the problem of time, to the problem of succession and simultaneity, how then is what Klee is calling polyphony to be understood?

As Apollinaire's characterization alluded to above, the history of the concept of time yields two concepts of simultaneity, each with a complicated descent. We can also see their effect in Klee, even explicitly in works such as *Cosmic and Earthly Time* (*kosmische und irdische Zeit*) (1927; fig. 1). Described as one of Klee's most bittersweet presentations of such themes, here sacred and secular, heavenly and earthly, finite and eternal time are counterposed, simultaneously and precariously balanced from a large pendulum-like figure.³³ Still, the dispersion is both conceptual and historical. Apollinaire's equation of simultaneity with eternity and

life directly echoes Boethius's definition of eternity as "the complete simultaneous and perfect possession of interminable life."³⁴ This is contrasted with sempiternity, the state of simply lasting endlessly, a conception with modern effect in Hegel's criticisms of "the spurious infinite."³⁵

The contrast between eternity and finite or mortal time intrinsic to Apollinaire's account also had ancient precursors. Augustine, for example, had found the measure of time in God, beyond the inconstancy of finite experience, thereby tacitly assuming two standpoints for the experience of time. Time itself however would not have existed without finitude, without creation: "before heaven and earth there was no time." Creation involves change, requires motion and "change cannot exist simultaneously."³⁶ God thus is not in time but precedes it: "all your 'years' exist simultaneously." Still the question of a plurality of times had already been broached in Aristotle's original (albeit somewhat circular) definition linking time and its measure as "the number of motion with

[Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010].

30 See Arthur I. Miller, *Einstein, Picasso: Space, Time, and the Beauty that Causes Havoc* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

31 See Herbert Read, *A Concise History of Modern Painting* (New York: Praeger, 1959), 186. Cf. the similar claim of Hubert Damisch, "Equals Infinity," *Twentieth Century Studies*, nos. 15–16 (1976): 56–81. Damisch claims, with reference to the modern formalization of geometry, that Klee's work overcomes the subjective phenomenological foundations of perspective. This claim will not receive further attention here but will be examined in detail in a second part of this study.

32 See Buckenrough, *Robert Delaunay*, 108–109.

33 See Richard Verdi, *Klee and Nature* (New York: Rizzoli, 1985), 175.

34 Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* 5.6.

35 See G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (New York: Humanities Press, 1969). Hegel criticized the spurious infinite in Kant and Fichte's account of the sublime and regulative reason (see 228ff.). Hegel maintained that in the relations articulated, one side, the ego's, still "preponderates," transforming the quantitative relation into a qualitative one (233). Hermann Weyl (and those in his wake) will make similar claims about the continuum, as shall be seen, but precisely by contesting the *Aufhebung* at work in Hegel's adjudication.

36 Augustine, *The City of God* 11.6.

respect to the before and the after.³⁷ Aristotle himself claimed that time is what is counted and not that with which we count, resisting thereby the possibility that each of them has a different time.³⁸ The modern conception of absolute time put any such indeterminacies to rest. Suarez still distinguished between the intrinsic motion of a body and mental time, “imaginary continuous succession.” But Gassendi, prefiguring Newton but also Kant’s constructivist transcendental aesthetic, claimed that there is no other time than “imaginary” time, a time that is necessary and “would flow even if the heavens were not moving.”³⁹ It would take Einstein to question the assumption, calling its concomitant notion of simultaneity and the archive of its various theoretical parameters into question.

On Kantian “constructivist” interpretations of cubism, Picasso (like Einstein) invents a new form of representation: “the simultaneous representation of entirely different viewpoints, the sum of which constitutes the object.”⁴⁰ Indeed the argument has been made that Picasso’s advance here was not simply metaphorically tied to Einstein’s. Both had depended in course on Poincaré’s discussion of non-Euclidean geometry. Gleizes and Metzinger’s classic 1912 study, *Cubism*, had first made the connection explicitly.⁴¹ But the authors of *Cubism* also followed Bergson and Poincaré in claiming that cubists do not follow traditional artistic convention but have recourse to “tactile and motor sensations.”⁴² At stake in such a “synthesis” is not an object but an experience. Bergson argued that such an experience or *durée* had to be disconnected from its objective formulation in space. On this account, Aristotle’s mistake was not his inability to deal with the relativity of simultaneity but to think about simultaneity in spatial terms at all. Duration was intrinsically simultaneous, the past is always present. Reflection organizes experience by utility; its objectification, consequently, constitutes the fallacy. Clearly Delaunay’s orphic experience, whose poetics metamorphosizes simultaneity into a transcendental appearance, resonates here.⁴³

Klee’s work reveals the cubists’ effect as early as 1913. His early written reviews stress in this regard that for “this school of form-philosophers ‘construction’ was more than a means for earlier epochs, it was indeed their characteristic.”⁴⁴ His work utilizes many of the motifs of cubist syntax. Yet he answers to neither

cubist interpretation; while providing a constructivist account of the picture plane, he still defended the requisites of intuition. If he appeals to Delaunay’s simultaneity and reveals at points links to Seurat’s contrasted color, the rhythmic Wechsel that underlies his art is not color, nor does he affirm orphic metaphysics.⁴⁵ As Franciscono points out, in orphic metaphysics there is a certain return of allegory, one that Klee’s ironic tensions refuse.⁴⁶ Like Oscar Lüthy, about whom Klee wrote in 1912, Jordan notes, “He does not go the dangerous way of Delaunay.... He knows how to hold the object in conciliatory relationship, although the picture idea predominates in strength.”⁴⁷

Not long after his early encounter with cubism, Klee’s writings began to stress the temporal aspects of the work. He succinctly expressed it in 1914: “Becoming is more important than being.”⁴⁸ The conception of the work became temporal through and through, its links to allegory fragmented. Yet as the 1917 diary entry we are considering notes, Klee’s simultaneity is also the simultaneity of its wellanschauung. His encounter with the First World War would only further emphasize its “worldhood.” Despite claims that Klee’s idealism amounted to an evasion of *Realpolitik* or *Neue Sachlichkeit*, Klee’s commentators have justly noted the proximity of Klee’s stress on the temporality of art to Heidegger’s *In-der-Welt-sein*.⁴⁹ Klee’s claim that the formal must fuse with the wellanschauung might indeed be taken as a gloss on the formal indications of Heidegger’s concept of temporal facticity. Heidegger had criticized Bergson not only for his interpretation of Aristotle, but Heidegger’s own ensuing understanding of time had itself emerged from an interpretation of Aristotle.

Indeed, the unpublished sections of Heidegger’s *magnum opus*, *Being and Time*, were to culminate in an analysis of Aristotle’s essay on time—as were his earlier lectures on the *History of the Concept of Time*.⁵⁰ While these remained promissory notes we can find hints of such an analysis in his lectures at the time, for example, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, written in 1927, where his analysis appears as part of a chapter on the problem of ontological difference. Here, too, perhaps, proximate to Klee, we might encounter the problem of simultaneity hovering.

Heidegger’s position can be summarized here only briefly. His discussion began singling out Bergson’s contribution in the most recent period. He noted, on the one hand, Bergson’s attempts to break with the common conception of time and, on the other, his critical examination of Einstein’s theory of relativity. Bergson, as has been seen, began with a criticism of Aristotle’s pointal-

37 Aristotle, *Physics* 220a.

38 *Ibid.*, 233b.

39 The above citations are taken from standard translations. These are collected in Max Jammer, *Concepts of Simultaneity: From Antiquity to Einstein and Beyond* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006). As will become evident, Heidegger’s *Being and Time* will undertake a radical reinterpretation of this tradition. Compare Heidegger’s later recapitulation of that treatise with reference to the concepts of eternity and sempiternity in *Schelling’s Treatise on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1985), 171.

40 Miller, *Einstein, Picasso*, 106.

41 Albert Gleizes and Jean Metzinger, “Cubism,” in *Modern Artists on Art*, ed. Robert L. Herbert (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 8.

42 See Linda Dalrymple Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 82–83.

43 For further discussion of this issue see Virginia Spate, *Orphism: The Evolution of Non-Figurative Painting in Paris, 1910–1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979).

44 Paul Klee, “Die Ausstellung des Modernen Bundes im Kunsthaus Zürich,” *Die Alpen* 6 (Aug. 1912), cited in Jordan, *Paul Klee*, 58–59.

45 I have further detailed the concept of Wechsel in my *Crescent Moon over the Rational: Philosophical Interpretations of Paul Klee* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009).

46 Marcel Franciscono, *Paul Klee: His Life and Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 164.

47 Klee, “Die Ausstellung des Modernen Bundes,” 703, cited in Jordan, *Paul Klee*, 114.

48 Klee, *Diaries*, #928.

49 Carolyn Lanchner, “Klee in America,” in *Paul Klee: His Life and Work* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1987), 84. Paul Klee’s friend and interpreter, Grohmann, concurred. See Will Grohmann, *Paul Klee* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1955), 214.

50 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) (hereafter cited as BT).

ist spatialization of time and denied its detachment from experience. Although Bergson fails, Heidegger claims, rendering his own account of *durée* “untenable,” the accounts remain “valuable because they manifest a philosophical effort to surpass the traditional concept of time” and the tendency to base its analyses on the ontic presence of the now.⁵¹

Heidegger further acknowledges Aristotle’s definition of time’s circularity, albeit by denying its formal or tautological failure in noting its hermeneutic status: “As Aristotle says in his interpretation, time can be interpreted only if it is understood by way of time, that is by way of original time.”⁵² Aristotle’s definition of time as the number of motion with respect to the before and after, attests to such originality, Heidegger claims. It does so, first of all, by articulating time as a phenomenon articulated, that is oriented, by the before and after, a horizonal phenomenon.⁵³ But Aristotle is not guilty of Bergson’s charge; he does not think of time spatially. The countable “now” through which time becomes articulated as present or past or before and after emerges only out of such oriented horizons. Rather than a simple linear series of “nows” there is a becoming and an essential difference or slipping-away to the now: inherently a “just then,” “not now,” “not yet,” and “no longer.” Indeed this difference is crucial: “This constitutes its always being now, its otherhood.”⁵⁴ In this very difference coming into being and passing away are simultaneously present in the now. While countable, the now is not a limit, not an ontically fixed point, but a transition; the consequence is that the now is “a continuum of the flux of time.”⁵⁵ The now emerges from an original temporality through which it becomes countable.⁵⁶

Heidegger’s considerations regarding the continuing relevance of Aristotle and Bergson may not end here. In his 1924–25 *Sophist* lectures, Heidegger claimed that Einstein’s physics too involved a certain return to Aristotle. As anachronistic as this might sound, one might recall Thomas Kuhn’s claim that in some ways (though not all) Einstein’s physics is closer to Aristotle’s than that of either of them is to Newton’s.⁵⁷ Heidegger apparently concurred.

A July 1924 lecture, “The Concept of Time,” briefly specified:

Space is nothing in itself; there is no absolute space. It exists by way of the bodies and energies contained in it. (An old proposition of Aristotle’s) [sic] Time too is nothing. It persists merely as a consequence of the events taking place in it. There is no absolute space and no absolute simultaneity either. In seeing the destructive side of this theory, one readily overlooks what is positive about it, namely, that it demonstrates precisely the invariability, with respect to arbitrary transformation, of those equations describing natural processes. Time is that within which events take place. This is what Aristotle has already seen, in the context of the fundamental kind of Being pertaining to natural being: change, change of place, locomotion.⁵⁸

Referencing Hermann Weyl’s 1923 influential book on relativity, *Space-Time-Matter*, Heidegger’s *Sophist* lectures further note that this reencounters the problem of the continuum. Weyl had been greatly influenced by Husserl while in Göttingen and a colleague of Einstein’s in Zurich. A decade previously Weyl had written a book on the continuum referencing Husserl’s time-analyses in its culminating argument.⁵⁹ The *Sophist* lectures’ own reference to Weyl almost remind one of Husserl’s Galileo analysis in *The Crisis of the European Sciences* that traces modern science’s progressive technical detachment from the lifeworld. The latter was apparently precipitated after a reported visit from Alexander Koyré, another member of the Göttingen circle, who had played a similar role in importing Bergson some twenty years earlier after a stay in Paris. Regardless, it is important to recall, in both cases, that scientific truth is not being contested. And this is perfectly correct. As has been noted, the relativity of the new theory, chiefly a “relativity of simultaneity,” is “one of the most solidly verified theories in the entire range of physics.”⁶⁰ Again, Heidegger’s lecture at this point is not about scientific truth but the interpretation of its concomitant ontologies or transcendental “residue,” to use the Husserlian term that Weyl invokes.⁶¹

While it has become *de rigueur* to confront Heidegger and Ernst Cassirer at this point, we should pause to note their striking

51 Martin Heidegger, *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982), 232. Heidegger’s evaluation elsewhere is perhaps even more positive: “Bergson first worked out the connection between a derived and an original time” (*The Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, trans. Michael Heim [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992], 203).

52 Heidegger, *Problems of Phenomenology*, 241.

53 *Ibid.*, 240.

54 *Ibid.*, 248.

55 *Ibid.*, 249.

56 Hence *Being and Time* will claim, “the expression ‘temporality’ does not signify what one understands by ‘time’ when one talks about ‘space and time’” (Heidegger, *BT*, 418). Nevertheless, the notion of such an *Urtemporalität* notwithstanding, granted his conception of *In-der-Welt-sein*, Heidegger also declared: “Nevertheless, Dasein must be called ‘temporal’ in the sense of Being ‘in time.’ Even without a developed historiography, factual Dasein needs and uses a calendar and a clock” (*Ibid.*, 429). This, too, is part of its facticity and why, as Weyl noted, all measuring involves relativity. See Hermann Weyl, *Space-Time-Matter*, trans. Henry L. Brose (London: Methuen, 1922), 9. For further discussion of Heidegger and Cassirer’s mutual relation to Weyl see my “In Schelling’s Shadow: Cassirer, Heidegger, the Narratives of Art and the Art of Narrative,” *Cassirer Studies* 4 (forthcoming).

57 Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 206–207.

58 Martin Heidegger, *The Concept of Time*, trans. William McNeill (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 3E. This heuristic differentiation of the nothingness of time is clearly already close to the role of *Das Nichts* that will invoke Carnap’s ire. Moreover, this articulation of time through “the hermeneutical possibility of the ‘not’” remains a continuing presence in Heidegger’s treatment, as evidenced from the 1962 *On Time and Being*: “Time is not. It gives time. The giving that gives time is determined by denying and withholding nearness” (*On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh [New York: Harper and Row, 1972], 16).

59 Weyl, *Continuum*, 10.

60 Ernan McMullin, cited in Jammer, *Concepts of Simultaneity*, 6.

61 Weyl, *Continuum*, 94; Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy: Book I*, trans. Fred Kersten (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1982), 63 (hereafter cited as *IPP*).

concurrence. Cassirer too acknowledged the horizons of the rational and the *focus imaginarius* that underwrites its claims: “we can never claim that this process has attained to the ultimate invariants of experience, which would then replace the immutable facticity of ‘things’; we can never grasp these invariants with our hands so to speak.”⁶² Cassirer also cited Weyl’s work on the continuum and his claim that the old explanation of number theory remains “too narrow.” Still, Weyl insisted on the link to consciousness and even more primordially to time: “Time is the primitive form [*die Urform*] of the stream of consciousness.”⁶³ The mathematical presentation of time, belying the continual slipping-away of subjective time, is an achievement or projection outside ourselves.

It is equally striking that Heidegger does not simply insist on connecting mathematics to his account of the modes of factual life here, indicative of the order of reasons operative in his argument.⁶⁴ Such a connection had been made by his student, Oskar Becker. Cassirer rigorously objected to this view, as he did to Heidegger’s account of fundamental ontology at Davos, precisely because it lacked any account of objectivity. Moreover, the phenomenological account was unnecessary; Cassirer claimed that mathematics could be theorized without such reference to “the experience of the mathematician,” since it required only reference to the “I think” of Kant’s transcendental apperception.⁶⁵ The disagreement here seems to circulate around the issue of what Cassirer called “subjective achievement” and how such considerations contextualize objectivization—again as Becker glossed it, around the issue of the mathematician’s *Selbstvergessenheit*, perhaps even the mathematician’s *Verfallensein*.⁶⁶ But, as the insistence upon the positive accomplishment of relativity theory above indicates, the proximity of Weyl to Heidegger’s analyses may also hold true—and as his consequent Aristotle analysis further reveals.⁶⁷

On Heidegger’s construal of Aristotle’s view, in any case, mathematical truths are extratemporal, not, initially, because they are inauthentic but “because they are not in motion.”⁶⁸ The measuring of time itself reveals the extratemporal character of mathematics. But as a consequence Heidegger does insist on the issue of “subjective achievement” (consistent with *Being and Time*): “the interpretation of intratemporality also tells us what can be intratemporal as well as, on the other hand, what it is extratemporal.”⁶⁹ Without denying such objectification, indeed he insists on Einstein’s positive accomplishment, Heidegger insists its status becomes radically apparent not by a transcendental deduction

from its objectified achievements (the “I think” that accompanies the achieved representation)—the counted now—but arises from within the critical differentiation, the measure of temporalization.⁷⁰ Put otherwise, this differentiation of time is itself internally heuristic.

Heidegger (again following Weyl) further noted that in this recent reencounter with the problem of the continuum the notion of a field becomes normative, again inherently denying that the problem of the continuum is analytically resolvable; instead it must be grasped as something “prior to...analytic penetration.”⁷¹ Cassirer, too, explicitly cited Weyl on this point.⁷² But it is perhaps not without positive resonance on Heidegger’s own ontological reconsideration of Aristotle. *Being and Time*’s constant use of “feld” to articulate the complicated constitution of *In-der-Welt-sein*, as an “equiprimordially [*Gleichsprünglichkeit*] of constitutive items” irreducible to a primordial foundation, perhaps latently further echoes this confluence between Aristotle and Einstein he has in mind.⁷³

If Klee’s work manifests a similarity at this point, the issue is not simply one of content, but also concerns the complex construction accompanying the articulation of the experience of facticity; indeed Klee’s polyphonic works’ interwoven planes, lines, and color (in conjunction with the complex genesis he ascribed to the work of art) also attest to such “equiprimordial constitution.” As has already become apparent, as Aristotle originally claimed: “one cannot put together a line out of points.”⁷⁴ Cassirer himself had identified such an Aristotelian conception with the phenomenological continuum.⁷⁵

Still, as Heidegger noted, Aristotle himself already posed the critical question, one that will lead directly to Augustine’s subjectivization of time, “whether if soul did not exist time would exist.”⁷⁶ But for Heidegger, “subjectivization” seems the wrong term.

We see by the interpretation of “being in time” that time, as the embracing, as that in which natural events occur, is, as it were, more objective than all objects. On the other hand, we see also that it exists only if the soul exists. It is more objective than all objects and simultaneously it is subjective, existing only if subjects exist.⁷⁷

62 Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. 3: *The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), 475.

63 Weyl, *Space-Time-Matter*, 5. (This is a translation of the third edition to which Heidegger’s lectures are referred.)

64 Proof of such an interpretation can be evidenced in the fact that while the event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) or “worlding” is at stake throughout his work, Heidegger’s *articulemes* alter.

65 Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 404n.

66 Oskar Becker, *Mathematische Existenz* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1973), 320–21.

67 Martin Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 95.

68 Heidegger, *Problems of Phenomenology*, 253.

69 *Ibid.*; Heidegger’s emphasis.

70 It would not be hard to argue that such critical “measuring” of temporality remains at stake in the account of historical *Kritik* in *Being and Time* 2.5. See, for example, BT, 449.

71 Martin Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), 80.

72 Cassirer, *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, 466.

73 Heidegger, BT, 170; Heidegger’s emphasis. One can note further that Heidegger had related Kant’s account of the constitutive structures of a priori intuition to Einstein. See his *Logic: The Question of Truth*, trans. Thomas Sheehan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010), 290.

74 Aristotle, *Physics* 231a24.

75 Ernst Cassirer, *Substance and Function: And Einstein’s Theory of Relativity*, trans. William Curtis Swabey and Marie Collins Swabey (Chicago: Open Court, 1923), 452. He further contrasted the position with Poincaré’s “there remains only the manifold, the unity has disappeared” (453).

76 Aristotle, *Physics* 223a21.

77 Heidegger, *Problems of Phenomenology*, 254–55; Heidegger’s emphasis.

Such a consequence requires an interpretation of the belonging together of subject and object, the complicated constitution of *Being and Time's* hermeneutic of *In-der-Welt-sein* with which Klee's work has been compared.⁷⁸ Philosophically it amounted to the claim that "the distinction between being and beings is temporalized in the temporalizing of temporality."⁷⁹ But as such, as measurable and ordinate as it might be, temporality could not be identified with such presentations. Critically, Weyl himself claimed, the essence of measuring requires this transcendental dimension, if only so that a system of coordinates be selected: "That is why a theory of relativity is perforce always involved in measurement."⁸⁰ But it also ultimately led him to claim, "the pair of opposites, subjective absolute and objective relative contains one the most fundamental epistemological insights which can be gleaned from science."⁸¹

Klee was no cubist in the end, any more than Heidegger, who, it has been reported, condemned cubism for its complicity with modern technology.⁸² Neither could rest easily with the antitheses of simple intuition or pure construction. One might also invoke Weyl's demurals here. As Cassirer noted, mathematics maintains an urge to totality. For Weyl, however, it reveals, as he put it in a later work, "that that desire can be fulfilled on one condition only, namely, that we are satisfied with the symbol and renounce the mystical error of expecting the transcendent ever to fall within the lighted circle of intuition."⁸³ The very choice of a coordinate system that had forced the issue of subjective measuring also limited the result. Quite literally, to use Jean Cavaillès's terms, "the term 'consciousness' does not admit of a univocity of application—no more than does the thing, as the unity which can be isolated."⁸⁴ This amounts to the internal constructive limitations to the articulation or "measuring" of any transcendental phenomenology, one affecting "phenomenologies" of various stripes, from Hegel to Husserl onward.

The objection might be made then that in focusing upon artis-

tic phenomenologies we have perhaps only analyzed a certain surface effect, even in articulating an "optics" beyond aesthetic and philosophical impressionism. It is true, as Klee put it: "time is an essential factor in the pictorial field."⁸⁵ So too in music: but it is the *deficiency* in music that seems to be decisive. What Klee notes in the diary passage we are considering is the advance of the graphic polyphonic work over the musical, precisely because it articulates not only a passage, or becoming but a certain history, a certain "retrograde motion" or reference to a past, an "animation" (perhaps a will or an instinct) and the horizons of a subject, a becoming inherent to the graphic line's very zigzag. Through this retrograde motion, Klee claimed (like Heidegger in ultimately denying Husserl's claim), time becomes spatial.

Now Husserl, who reportedly considered his own account to be "the true Bergsonism," referred in this regard to the "double intentionality" of temporal consciousness; he understood its intentional zigzag to form the *mis en scène* of phenomenology.⁸⁶ Duration cannot be posited without being posited in a temporal context. In such a context the present now already contains its ("longitudinal or horizontal") past. In turn, the present intentional ("traverse") reference already contains its reverse order.⁸⁷ It belongs to the essence of the now that it be united with this consciousness "in opposite" directions which are given "simultaneously": the present is posited with its past, the recollected past, its present.⁸⁸ In both regards, "Foreground is nothing without background."⁸⁹ This is how Heidegger, one of the editors of Husserl's manuscripts on time, had understood Aristotle's account as oriented: to invoke the language of *Being and Time*, it involved "a remarkable 'relatedness back or forward.'"⁹⁰ In it, as Husserl expands, simultaneity is nothing without succession and succession without simultaneity.⁹¹ However, Husserl (like Bergson) himself often invoked music as the model of unity and iterable identity and thus the possibility of "a fulfilled continuum" of experienced time.⁹² But precisely here, apparently, is where Klee demurred in assigning a retrograde motion to the graphic line as unattainable musically.

Such claims to the unities or harmonies of musical immanence carried their own antinomies. It meant for Husserl (as for Einstein) that cosmic time and phenomenological time must be strictly distinguished.⁹³ The question of their mutual relation denied, Husserl declared, even an account of "metaphorical similarity." The transcendental earth does not move.⁹⁴ Even so the unity pur-

78 Paul Ricoeur has rightly suggested that Heidegger's account here overcomes the *opinio* between cosmic or natural time and experiential time in the tradition, between Augustine and Aristotle, Kant, and Husserl. He argues that the account still fails since it, too, remains incapable of grounding natural time. We should wonder however whether his argument concerns [as did the differences of stake between Cassirer and Heidegger or Weyl] necessary or sufficient conditions of this point. See Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, trans. Kathleen Blomey and David Pellouer, vol. 3 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 91f. Such issues would continue to overdetermine interpretations of Heidegger's temporal idealism in Ricoeur's wake.

79 Heidegger, *BT*, 310.

80 Weyl, *Space-Time-Matter*, 9.

81 Hermann Weyl, *Philosophy of Mathematics and Natural Science* (1927), trans. Olaf Helmer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), 116.

82 See Heinrich Wiegand Petzet, *Encounters and Dialogues with Martin Heidegger, 1919–1976*, trans. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Moly (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 146.

83 *Ibid.*, 26.

84 Hence Cavaillès's claim: a philosophy of consciousness inevitably encounters a philosophy of the concept. The generating necessity of phenomenology "is not the necessity of an activity but the necessity of *o* dialectic." But like the internal limitation that it articulates this dialectic also remains "phenomenological." See Jean Cavaillès, "On Logic and the Theory of Science," in *Phenomenology and the Natural Sciences*, ed. J. Kockelmans and T. Kisiel (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 409.

85 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 503.

86 Husserl's claim that his was the true Bergsonism was reported by Ingarden. See Herbert Spiegelberg, *The Phenomenological Movement* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1984), 446n2.

87 Edmund Husserl, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*, trans. John Burnet Brough (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 390ff. (hereafter cited as *CIT*).

88 *Ibid.*, 314–15.

89 *Ibid.*, 316.

90 Heidegger, *BT*, 28.

91 Husserl, *CIT*, 386.

92 Husserl, *IPP*, 194.

93 *Ibid.*, 193.

94 See Edmund Husserl, "Foundational Investigations of the Phenomenological Origin of the Spatiality of Nature: The Originary Ark, the Earth, Does Not Move," trans. Fred Kersten and Leonard Lowlor in Maurice Merleau-Ponty,

chased here was also problematic. While Husserl appealed to the immanence of the reflective regard, the proposed unity of the horizons out of which it emerged was again (as in the case of Cassirer's claims about science) a Kantian idea.⁹⁵ We might question whether, against the regulative status of this claim, the mathematical model (and the mathematical continuum of constitutively continuous "nows") still structured Husserl's models, whether, to use Desanti's terms, the *topos* of phenomenology was not intrinsically "utopian."⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty called Husserl's model a "positivist projection," claiming (again in reference to Heidegger) that we must pass beyond the identity of the thing to thing as difference.⁹⁷ Like the musical work of art in need of a retrograde motion, the ego cannot presuppose such immanence; it must be successively constructed, an identity that is drawn together only "at a distance."⁹⁸ To use Merleau-Ponty's Proustian figure: "Thus I function by construction. I am installed on a pyramid of time which has been me."⁹⁹ Rather than simply an egological account phenomenology would require further account of the event of its emergence, precisely a "cosmology of the visible."¹⁰⁰ Even Husserl's account, barring such a link to facticity, tacitly admitted the passage beyond immanence: reflection always emerges from a "horizon of unregarded mental processes."¹⁰¹ To reinvoke Weyl's figure, the shadow that we cannot jump over is that time can "never" be fully reduced, given to a "single pure regard" or glance; it is always articulated from a standpoint, a single adumbration or shadowing-off (*Abschattung*).¹⁰² But what is it that happens then in the retrograde motion of Klee's graphic line, that somehow conjoins immanence and transcendence, the regard and the unregarded, even cosmic and phenomenological time in one event?

In the first place, we should be reminded of Kant: one cannot represent a line without drawing it, again an experience belying its representation as a set of points.¹⁰³ It was a question again of a priori (subjective) intuition, its temporal genesis. Here however Kant in effect had bequeathed a mixed message to his followers.¹⁰⁴ Cassirer (and the logical positivists) had sought to develop

an account of the Kantian a priori by jettisoning its experiential link.¹⁰⁵ Husserl, Weyl, and Heidegger after them (like Klee) retained the link to intuition, to a residue that cannot be simply extensionally replaced. As Klee put it, "We construct and keep on constructing, yet intuition is a good thing. You can do a good deal without it, but not everything."¹⁰⁶

The graphic line already contains the "retrograde motion" that any conception of the infinitesimal of the simple constructed point forecloses. Like the perception of a real object, it has its "slipping away," its "reverse side as background."¹⁰⁷ Here is where Heidegger declared that the heuristic identity of the now is wholly difference and differentiation.¹⁰⁸ Hence, the experienced now, the now as a continuum of the flux is understood not as one of immanent experience but of transcendence, of an original temporality in which it is "embraced" (to use Husserl's term, "founded") and out of which it is articulated, measured.¹⁰⁹ Here is where Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty had broken with the priority granted by Husserl to immanence. The articulation of the temporality (the *logos* of phenomenology) that embraces all things (intratemporal and extratemporal) cannot be reduced to one of its dimensions, the simple serial or optic duration of the present. Temporality, to use Klee's terms, is one of those elements that "renders visible." And, on Heidegger's interpretation, missing this was not only Bergson's (or even Husserl's) mistake, but the philosophical tradition's writ large.

Even if the measured were timeless, the measuring is not. As Heidegger cited Count York, we are "historically determined, just as physics knows we are cosmically determined."¹¹⁰ Weyl's invocation of the (almost Nietzschean) shadow that one cannot jump over seems to concur. Later Heidegger will invoke this same Nietzschean shadow as precisely the shadow that traditional metaphysics sought to eradicate. But even if Heidegger's *Being and Time* sought to resolve the issue in a *Dasein* analysis, it did so only by turning phenomenology interpretive. But how does this become manifest in Klee's account?

To illustrate this retrograde motion, Klee uses a telling example in a 1917 diary entry, recalling the mirror image (*Spiegelbild*) in the windows of the moving trolley.

To illustrate the retrograde motion which I am thinking up for music, I remember the mirror image in the windows of the moving trolley.

Husserl at the *Limits of Phenomenology*, ed. Leonard Lawlor and Bettina Bergo (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2002), 117–31. In making these strict distinctions, in mutually claiming to possess the object exclusively in advance, Merleau-Ponty declared that Husserl and Einstein form the limit of classical reason (Signs, trans. Richard C. McCleary [Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964], 192). For further discussion of this issue see my "Notes on Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard," in *Phenomenology, Institution, and History: Writings After Merleau-Ponty 2* (London: Continuum, 2009), 78–97.

95 Husserl, *IPP*, 197.

96 Jean-Toussaint Desanti, *Réflexions sur le temps* (Paris: Grasset, 1992), 156. For Desanti, Husserl's account thus remains "speculative."

97 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 195, 231.

98 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, rev. Forrest Williams (New York: Humanities Press, 1962), 408.

99 Merleau-Ponty, Signs, 14; *Perception*, 393.

100 Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 265.

101 Husserl, *IPP*, 197.

102 *Ibid.*, 193, 197.

103 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: MacMillan, 1973), 167 (B 154).

104 Here I follow J. Alberto Coffa, *The Semantic Tradition from Kant to Carnap: To the Vienna Station* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991),

43–44. For a discussion of the hermeneutic reception of Kant's "mixed message" see my *Tradition(s) 2: Hermeneutics, Ethics, and the Dispensation of the Good* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001), 226ff.

105 Cassirer however retained the role of transcendental intuition for transcendental methodology. See Cassirer, *Substance and Function*, 451 n. Cassirer still here reflects Weyl's claim that the choice of a coordinate system required the residuum of transcendental experience.

106 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 69.

107 Husserl, *CIT*, 316.

108 Heidegger, *Problems of Phenomenology*, 248. We should add that here is where time became paradigmatic for the constructions (and deconstructions) of the phenomenological subject: to use Merleau-Ponty's terms, its premier model (*le premier modèle*) (*Perception*, 352).

109 Heidegger, *BT*, 418.

110 *Ibid.*, 453. This of course does not entail that the "determinations" of physics and those of history are the same.

Delauany strove to shift the accent in art onto the time element, after the fashion of a fugue, by choosing formats that could not be encompassed in one glance.¹¹¹

Such a *Spiegelbild* again articulates a zigzag or *Wechsel* and articulates a transcendence, an experience unencompassable by a glance or a single regard. Both Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty will not be far off. Heidegger will speak similarly of the world as *Spielraum*: Merleau-Ponty of the reversibility that lines it.¹¹² Here the “retrograde” truly entails its reverse side as background; identity arises only through an internal difference or differentiation, an event of appropriation (*Ereignis*) of equiprimordial constitution: its “just now” always a “present/past” of an “earlier/later.”

The temporality of the line further articulates the retrograde motion, the *Wechsel* of time itself, of production and reception, protention and retention:

A linear figure takes time, and one must travel receptively the same road as one has taken productively.... A line contains energies that manifest themselves by cutting and by consuming time [*schneidend und zeitraubend*]. This gives the line a mutual relation to imaginary space [*eine Wechselseitige Beziehung zum imaginären Raum*].¹¹³

Through such “cutting” the differentiated picture plane acquires both an imaginary depth and a symbolic dimension.¹¹⁴ It

articulates, if you will, the precosmic genesis of Being-in-the-World. And, the continuum that results not only articulates the trace (the “spread”) of its past (the “just now”) but its finitude bears witness to the transcendence and dissonance, the sublime in its midst; it reveals to use Klee’s terms, a fragmented event where “we have the parts but not the whole.”¹¹⁵ Klee even claims that the spatiality of the picture is similarly oriented between (simultaneous) horizons: the “upward drive operates only as a corollary to the downward pull (the attraction of the earth).”¹¹⁶ But what does this *Wechsel* between the constructive and the symbolic entail for Klee?

As close as Klee was to the constructivist aesthetic theories of the Bauhaus he never fully complied with them. No more than he was ultimately swayed by the destructions and constructions of cubism. He remained everywhere interested in science and integrated a wide variety of scientific theories into his art, including statics and dynamics, electromagnetic phenomena, plant anatomy, cell structure and growth, weather patterns, and geological change, for example. Yet even though there is evidence that Einstein’s work was known by members of the Bauhaus (and that Einstein was one of its supporters against its political opponents) there is no ultimate evidence that Klee depended on Einstein’s physics or even knew them. Indeed it is perhaps more fitting to think of Carnap lecturing (as he did in October 1929) on Einstein at the Bauhaus and where, not incidentally, he initially rehearsed his objections to Heidegger’s “mystic” metaphysics.¹¹⁷

Instead of relying upon the science Carnap privileged, Klee was more interested in its meaning or “residue,” both in grasping the advance of modern science and its symbolic effect, grasping both the construction and its “retrograde” effect or historicity. Hence, again, the tensions of his synthesis emerge. Klee’s notion of the symbol certainly has romantic overtones even while based in the synthesis of subjective and objective space and the integration of modern science. No more than Heidegger was attempting to replace physics with his interpretation of phenomenology was Klee attempting to trump science with art or the aesthetic. Phenomenological time is not the ultimate truth of time any more than relativity theory’s well-confirmed account of simultaneity exhausts its experience (or intelligibility). Here even Heidegger and Cassirer were in concurrence. Heidegger aptly claimed that Aristotle and Einstein came at the measuring at stake from “opposite directions.”¹¹⁸ Cassirer himself, looking straight at Weyl,

111 Klee, *Diaries*, #1081.

112 See Heidegger, *BT*, 141; Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible*, 147ff; cf. Merleau-Ponty, *Perception*, 408. Later Heidegger will return to this interplay at stake in time (*On Time and Being*, 15). Like Delaunay, Merleau-Ponty appealed to Leonardo’s discussion of simultaneity in constructing his account of reversibility. See *Notes de cours, 1959–1961*, ed. Stéphanie Ménasé (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 175ff.

113 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 340.

114 Indeed, such symbolic “cutting” might be aptly construed in Lacanian overtones. Accordingly, Žižek wondered, with respect to Heidegger, whether the account of *In-der-Welt-sein* had confronted the (Kantian) antinomies that overdetermine his cosmology; he argued that such antinomies “undermine the very notion of cosmos as a whole of the universe, as a meaningful hermeneutic totality of surroundings, as a *lifeworld* in which a historical people dwells.” See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* (London: Verso, 1999), 50. For Žižek, this totalization is undercut by Kant’s element of the sublime, even the monstrous, that Heidegger’s cosmic image represses from his reading of Kant. Žižek affirmed Heidegger’s emphasis upon transcendental imagination as “fully justified in his ferocious aversion to Cassirer’s reading of Kant during their famous Davos debate in 1929” (27). Yet, uncannily, Žižek’s objection still remained proximate to Cassirer, who argued that Kant’s antinomies instead authorized an account of transcendental freedom—purportedly also insufficiently emphasized in Heidegger’s account. Without simply denying either of these antinomical claims (ultimately claims regarding ontotheology or cosmotheology), I have reemphasized the oscillation or zigzag at stake in the transcendental imagination. Contra Žižek, here the event of appropriation belies immanent totalization, articulating an oscillation Heidegger linked both to transcendence and ekstasis, and all three to the Worlding (*Weltet*) of the world. See Heidegger, *Metaphysical Foundations of Logic*, 209. This oscillation also renders the “opening” of the work of art, articulating its distance from desire without simply surpassing it. The work of art would thus neither escape desire (or nature) nor subsume it before consciousness, representation, and determinate judgment: it neither “intends” to escape

the libidinal scène nor to ultimately know it but instead to reveal or figure it. For a similar analysis with respect to Klee see Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Anthony Hudek and Mary Lyon (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 205–232.

115 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 95.

116 *Ibid.*, 44.

117 For the details here see Sara Lynn Henry, “Paul Klee’s Pictorial Mechanics from Physics to the Picture Plane,” *Bruckmanns Pantheon* 47 (1989): 164n. Also see Peter Galison, “Aufbau/Bauhaus: Logical Positivism and Architectural Modernism,” *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 709–752. Granted the rapprochement that occurred between Hannes Meyer and the later Dessau Bauhaus with the logical positivists, Feigl and Carnap, Klee’s attempt to synthesize construction and intuition clearly takes him in different directions, bringing him closer to Heidegger and Weyl. As I will detail further elsewhere, Carnap, accordingly, aligned Klee with what he termed Husserl’s “metaphysics of consciousness.”

118 Heidegger, *Plato’s Sophist*, 41.

claimed that the question as to which form of knowledge, the phenomenological or the physical “expresses the true reality has lost fundamentally for us all definite meaning.”¹¹⁹ In the end, he claimed, both Bergson and Newton were “conceptual fictions.” What is perhaps as decisive as their dispute is capturing the passage or concurrence between Heidegger and Cassirer.

“Algebraic, geometrical, and mechanical problems are steps in our education towards the essential, towards the functional as opposed to the impressional. We learn to see what flows beneath.”¹²⁰ Clearly Klee, too, was no positivist: “Mathematics and physics provide a lever in the form of rules to be observed or contradicted.”¹²¹ Or: “In art the essential is to create movement according to rules, to create deviations while bearing the rules in mind.”¹²² The same zigzag by which he articulated the rhythmicity of his graphic line was true of the *Wechsel* conceptualized in his art in general. It was a similar zigzag between concept and intuition by which Husserl had articulated phenomenological possibility; to use Klee’s terms from the diary entry we have considered: “Everything we see is a proposal, an expedient.”¹²³ Indeed he writes, “I state a priori formulas for men, beasts, plants, stones and the elements, and for all whirling forces.”¹²⁴ Commentators have pointed out the bridge between Klee and the zigzag of Husserl’s epoché.¹²⁵ At the same time, he remains close to Weyl’s epistemological disjunct concerning the subjective-absolute and objective-relative with its renunciation of the transcendental illusion of expecting the transcendent to fall within the lighted circle of intuition. Instead recourse must be made to symbolic construction. As Klee put it: “We must work our way back to unity.”¹²⁶ And this very *nonromantic* truth is also at work in Klee’s symbol and his symbolic construction of the picture plane, clearly one with formal implications. As Weyl had put it, “Intuition is not blissful repose never to be broken, it is driven on toward the dialectic and adventure of cognition [*Erkenntnis*].”¹²⁷

Klee’s famous 1918 “Creative Credo” also closes by making reference to Delaunay as he did in July 1917, further articulating the complex synthesis or “cutting” at stake in his work:

119 Cassirer, *Substance and Function*, 454.

120 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 69.

121 *Ibid.*

122 *Ibid.*, 152.

123 Klee, *Diaries*, #1081.

124 *Ibid.*, #1008.

125 See Albert Cook, “The Sign in Klee,” *Word and Image* 2, no. 4 (Oct.–Dec. 1986): 364. Cook argues, moreover, that such “bracketing” allows Klee both to surpass the optics of cubism and (unlike Picasso’s interest in primitivism) to triumph over myth [374]. For Husserl’s analysis of the “zigzag” between concept and intuition see *Logical Investigations Volume I*, trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), 260. Artistically, Klee’s conceptual emphasis upon the pure possibilities of the graphic line echoes (and more explicitly reflects) Wilhelm Worringer’s account of the “the purely abstract” or inorganic “gothic” line, no longer dependent on the object—and itself modeled on the abstract or essential expressive possibilities, the *Linienpiel* or rhythmic zigzag of sketching. See Wilhelm Worringer, *Form Problems of the Gothic* (New York: G. E. Stechert, 1918), 46. The difference, as Lyotard notes, is that the abstraction inherent to the gothic line remained regulated by a determinate possibility and Script(ure). See *Discourse, Figure*, 439n.

126 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 153.

127 Weyl, *Mathematics and Natural Science*, 26.

To this corresponds a simultaneous union of forms, movement and countermovement, or to put it naively, of objective contrasts (the use of disjunct color contrasts, as by Delaunay). Every energy requires its complement to bring itself to rest outside the field of force. Abstract formal elements are put together like numbers and letters to make concrete beings or abstract things; in the end a formal cosmos is achieved, so much like the Creation that a mere breath suffices to transform religion into act.¹²⁸

Delaunay’s objective contrasts provide a formal cosmos that opens up the depths of artistic possibility. It facilitates an initial step involving “the liberation of the elements, their arrangement in subsidiary groups, simultaneous destruction and construction towards the whole, pictorial polyphony, the creation of rest through the equipoise of motion.” These are indeed characteristics of the works of Delaunay that Klee had seen and discussed. But he immediately adds: “All these are lofty aspects of the question of form, crucial to formal wisdom; but they are not yet art in the highest sphere.”¹²⁹ The same can be claimed for Delaunay’s incorporation of time, still ontic, adopted to the serial appearance of the object, i.e. optic.¹³⁰ Instead Klee’s truth “remains invisible, beneath the surface.” Beyond the visual it explores the precosmic depths and the shadows of the imaginary and its extension into the transcendent. Here like the shadow of Weyl’s ineliminable *residuum* or *Abschattung* of consciousness, beyond the philosophers of form and Delaunay’s formal cosmos with its emphasis on light, Klee affirms: “the graphic world consists of light and shadow.”¹³¹

As was noted at the outset, Klee’s symbolic quest had been integrated with a rich thought of the philosophers of forms. As the July 1917 diary entry states: “Philosophy, so they say, has a taste for art; at the beginning I was amazed at how much they saw.”¹³² What “the philosophers of form” left out was precisely what Klee referred to as *Weltanschauung*, what Heidegger called the “worlding” of the world. In this they, too, remained optical: “The world was my subject, even though it was not the visible world.”¹³³ What their forms left out—and why Klee’s commentators kept connecting him with Heidegger—was the zigzag and symbolic “cutting” or articulation out of which such “worlding” rises: “But we investigate the formal for the sake of expression.” Put otherwise, what they missed was the zigzag of construction, the work of art’s *Wechselkonstruktion*.¹³⁴

128 Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 79. Klee’s references to creation have often provoked parallels with Schelling. See, for example, Henri Maldiney, *REGARD, Parole, Espace* (Lausanne: Editions l’Age d’Homme, 1994), 173–207.

129 *Ibid.*

130 Compare Henderson, *The Fourth Dimension*, 91: “Time in Cubist painting plays only a supporting role, allowing the artist or geometer to accomplish the physical or mental movement necessary to form an idea of an object’s total dimensionality.”

131 Klee, *Diaries*, #1081.

132 *Ibid.*

133 *Ibid.*

134 The term *Wechselkonstruktion* is Friedrich Schlegel’s. Like others, I have



Fig. 2: Paul Klee, *Angel's Care* (*Engelshut*), 1931/54. Chalk on paper on cardboard, 19.6 x 22.7 cm, © Rheinisches Bildarchiv Köln, RBA 188 640.

Geelhaar notes that the differential of polyphonic space involved a differential of simultaneity, of different levels, planes, and themes.¹³⁵ This architectonics became explicit in works such as *Polyphony of Surfaces and Lines* (*polyphon-bewegtes*) (1930) or *Polyphonic Architecture* (*polyphone Architektur*) (1930; plate 62), and *Swinging, Polyphonic (and in Complementary Repetition)* [*Schwingendes, polyphon (und in complementärer Wiederholung)*] (1931). Moreover it provided a formal space whose syntactic multiplicity was capable of adoption and semantic transformation.¹³⁶ We have noted its formal proximity to Heidegger's equiprimordial constitution that undertakes the analysis of *Dasein's* Being-in-the-world by a kind of zigzag between the elements of its composition. Articulated through the *Urform* of primordial temporality the analysis remained hermeneutic: neither axiomatic nor foundational. Such a hermeneutic does not attempt to leap over the shadow of its own facticity but articulates its temporal "embrace" through the backward and forward motion inherent to time itself. Like Delaunay, it is not accidental that Heidegger would invoke the fuge as a model for

argued for its importance for Heidegger—*and* Klee. See my *Crescent Moon over the Rational*.

- 135 Geelhaar, *Klee and the Bouhaus*, 129–31. Geelhaar points out the simultaneous outline and use of planes of *Little Fool in a Trance* (*Kleiner Narr in Trance*) [1927] [169–71] that in turn served as model for two pointed versions of *Figurine: The Jester* (*Figurine: der Narr*) [1927] and, two years later, *Fool in a Trance* (*Narr in Trance*) [1929], reemerging finally in *Steamer and Sailing Boats* (*Dampfer und Segelboote*) (1931) and in the series devoted to *Engelshut* referred to below. To such syntactic considerations we might add further semantic or iconographic transformations. For example such architectural themes of stoke in *Cosmic and Earthly Time* (1927) are also close by in the famous *The Limits of Reason* (*Grenzen des Verstandes*) [1927] produced not long after and still of stoke in *Polyphonic Architecture* that articulates the "ontic" city outline through polyphonic dimensionality.
- 136 Compare Klee's "Creative Credo": "Through such enrichment of the formal symphony the possibilities of variation, and with them the ideal expressive possibilities, become innumerable" (Klee, *The Thinking Eye*, 78 [translation altered]).

the "junctures" or chapters of his *Beitrage*.¹³⁷ But this means in turn that such a structure never rises beyond interpretation; the possible weavings of its narrative remain always multiple. This is perhaps what Jean-François Lyotard meant in seeing in Klee's magic squares the end of grand narrative.¹³⁸ And this is perhaps what authors like Cassirer or Scheler, Sartre or Merleau-Ponty, Stein or Levinas meant in contesting the details of Heidegger's account and arguing for alternatives. But, of course, no less than Heidegger later sought to emend his account—and as has been seen, he did not reject the narratives of care, Being-toward-Death and *Dasein's* *Verfallensein* into consideration in his initial discussion of the formal measurement of time. He not only exhibited thereby the order of reasons, the articulation (or "measuring") of time within the part-whole relations inherent to the rational, but he also recognized explicitly that such multiplicity was not a threat: "This multiplicity of possible interpretation does not discredit strictness of the thought content."¹³⁹ What is almost forgotten is that the *articulemes* such as care that resulted and came to be almost staunchly (and at times infamously) iconic in this regard were always part of a "preparatory" venture, a provisional moment in the analysis undertaken by Heidegger to grasp the meaning of Being.¹⁴⁰ But their proximity to Klee doubtless reveals again the irony at stake. As Geelhaar again observes, such polyphonic structures noted above found their way into some of Klee's own iconic works. Klee's works, such as his angels, continued to be especially provocative for his philosophical interpreters, from Walter Benjamin onward.¹⁴¹ But they also appear not far from the *articulemes* for Heidegger's account where, for example, they appear even in a polyphonic series devoted to the "care" of angels (*Angel's Care*) (*Engelshut*) (1931; fig. 2).¹⁴² ■

137 Heidegger, *Contributions to Philosophy*, 56.

138 Jean-François Lyotard, "Adorno as the Devil," *Telos* 19 (Spring 1974): 137.

139 Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, trans. Fred D. Wieck and J. Glen Groy (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 7. For further discussion of this issue see my "Abysces," in *Extensions: Essays on Interpretation, Rationality, and the Closure of Modernism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 25–46. As previously noted, Heidegger himself found the details of Klee's theoretical writings too neo-Kantian. I have suggested elsewhere that they assist us in making explicit the construction of Heidegger's own account. I note finally of this point that Heidegger understood himself to be transforming Husserl's account of the logic of parts and wholes. See BT, 494n. One should not neglect Heidegger's later claim that the attempt to "derive" space from primordial temporality was "untenable" (*On Time and Being*, 10). But as has become evident (and as Heidegger will later state explicitly), the very model of equiprimordial constitution belies foundationalism (*On Time and Being*, 32). Hence, unlike Husserl's gloss on the founding or what Heidegger calls the "embracing" of time (BT, 418), the temporality of *Dasein's* *In-der-Weltsein* in this sense is already "cosmic." It is in this regard that "the belonging-together of being and time," or what he called through Ereignis, sustains the claim that "true time is four-dimensional" (*On Time and Being*, 19).

140 Heidegger, BT, 64–65; cf. *On Time and Being*, 34.

141 Neither Klee nor his interpreters avoided the daemonic implications. Indeed Klee's *Fool in a Trance* (1929) is often seen to be paradigmatic of the polyphonic. See my "To Sketch on Essence: Schematic Thoughts on Paul Klee and the Image of the Daemonic," *Research in Phenomenology* 41 (2011): 253–75.

142 Geelhaar, *Klee and the Bouhaus*, 137–39.



1. *Green Terrain (grünes Gelände)*, 1938/117

Oil and watercolor on primed cardboard, 37.5 x 50.5 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Livia Klee Donation, SLK B 72



2. *Wall Plant (Mauerpflanze)*, 1922/153

Watercolor and pen on paper on cardboard, 25.8 x 30.2 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Seth K. Sweetser Residuary Fund, 64.526

Photograph © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



3. *Insects (Insecten)*, 1919/144

Lithograph and watercolor on paper, 20 x 15.2 cm
Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum
Bequest of Betty Bartlett McAndrew, 1986.488



4. *Perception of an Animal (Erkenntnis eines Tieres)*, 1925/190

Pen on paper on cardboard, 32.5 x 22.2 cm
Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum
Association Fund, BR48.129



5. *The Scales of Twilight* (*Die Waage der Dämmerung*), 1921/134

Oil transfer drawing and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 44.5 x 29.4 cm

Private collection

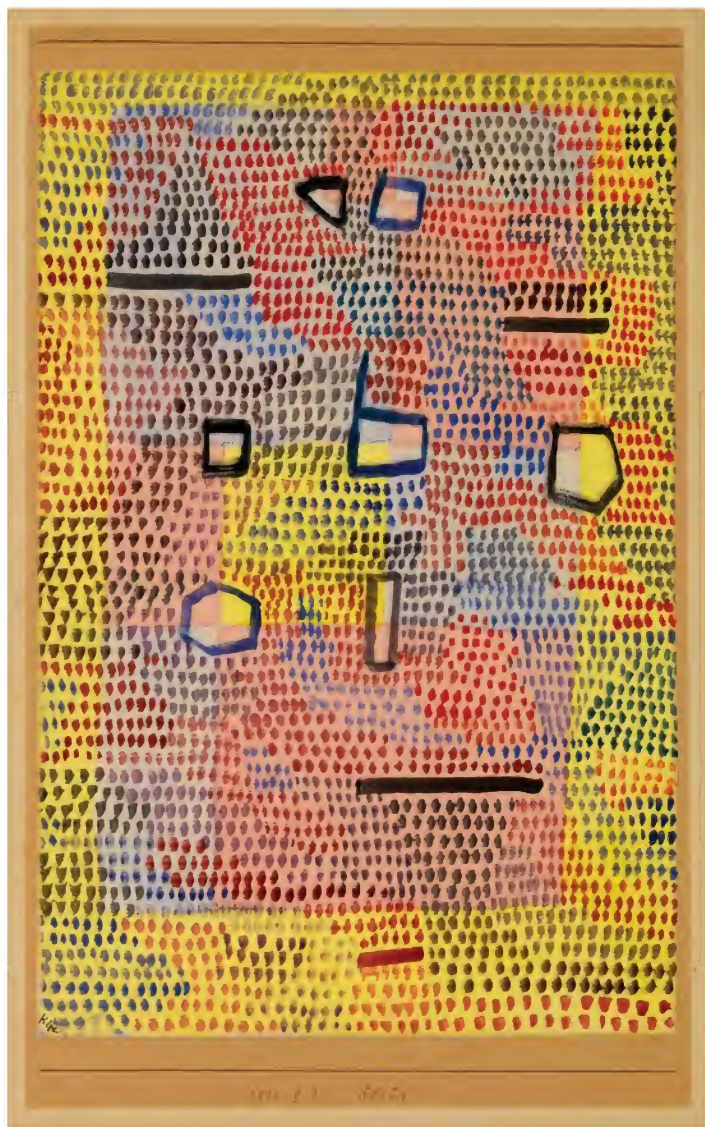


6. *Agricultural Experimental Layout for Late Fall (Agricultur
Versuchs anlage für den Spätherbst)*, 1922/137

Pen and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 18.6 x 30.1 cm

Colby College Museum of Art, Waterville, ME

Gift of Jere Abbott, 1970.016



7. Äliup (äliup), 1931/177

Watercolor and pencil on paper on cardboard, 47.9 x 31.4 cm

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA

Gift of the estate of Mrs. Sigmund Kunstadter (Maxine Weill, Class of 1924), SC 1978.56.107



8. *Late Evening Looking Out of the Woods (Spät Abends aus dem Wald geblickt)*, 1937/34

Oil and colored paste on paper on cardboard, 42.5 x 46.5 cm

Saint Louis Art Museum

Museum purchase, 119:1947

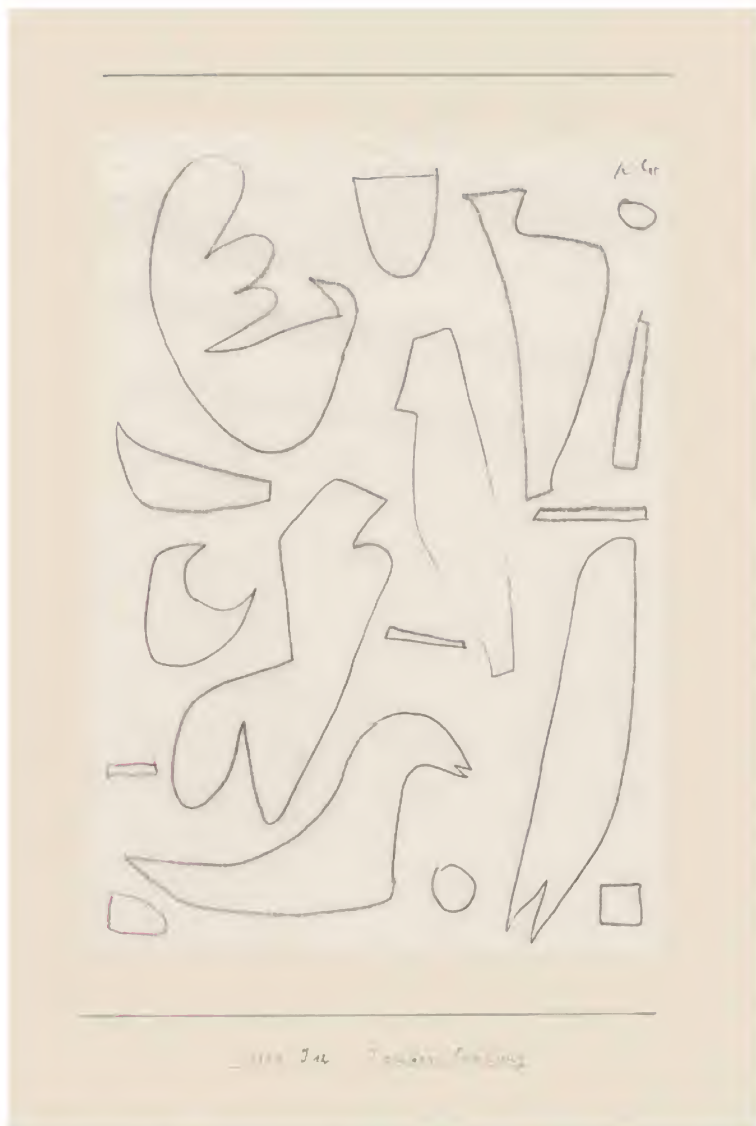


9. Little Tree (Bäumchen), 1935/147

Pen on paper on cardboard, 21.1 x 18.5 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1226



10. *Collection of Doves (Tauben Sammlung)*, 1939/72

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 29.8 x 20.9 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1439



11. *(Composition with Symbols) (Composition mit Symbolen)*, 1917/140

Pen and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 15.3 x 13.4 cm
Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA
Gift of Rosalind Schang Swanson (Class of 1943), 1992.12



12. *Both of Them (die Beiden)*, 1930/79

Pen on paper on cardboard, 20.3 x 14.6 cm

Smith College Museum of Art, Northampton, MA

Purchased with the gift of Priscilla Cunningham (Class of 1958), SC 1977.18



13. *Collection of Figurines (Figurinensammlung)*, 1926/248

Oil on canvas on cardboard, 26.4 x 24.4 cm

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY

The Berggruen Klee Collection, 1984.315.47



14. *Unebene Flucht (unebene Flucht)*, 1939/741

Pencil on paper on cardboard, 27 x 21.5 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1818



15. *Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying (geht kaum mehr, fliegt noch nicht)*, 1927/163

Pen on paper on cardboard, 41.5 x 30.5 cm
Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum
Loan from Jean C. Evans, 7.BR80



16. *Superior Bird (höherer Vogel)*, 1940/73

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 29.5 x 20.9 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 2103



17. *Waterbirds (Wasservögel)*, 1939/771

Colored paste and pencil on paper on cardboard, 27 x 21.4 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Otis Norcross Fund, 56.105

Photograph © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



18. *From Gliding to Rising (von Gleiten zu Steigen)*, 1923/89

Oil transfer and watercolor on paper on cardboard, 35.6 x 51.7 cm

Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum

Bequest of Virginia H. Deknatel in memory of Wilhelm Koehler, 2009.3

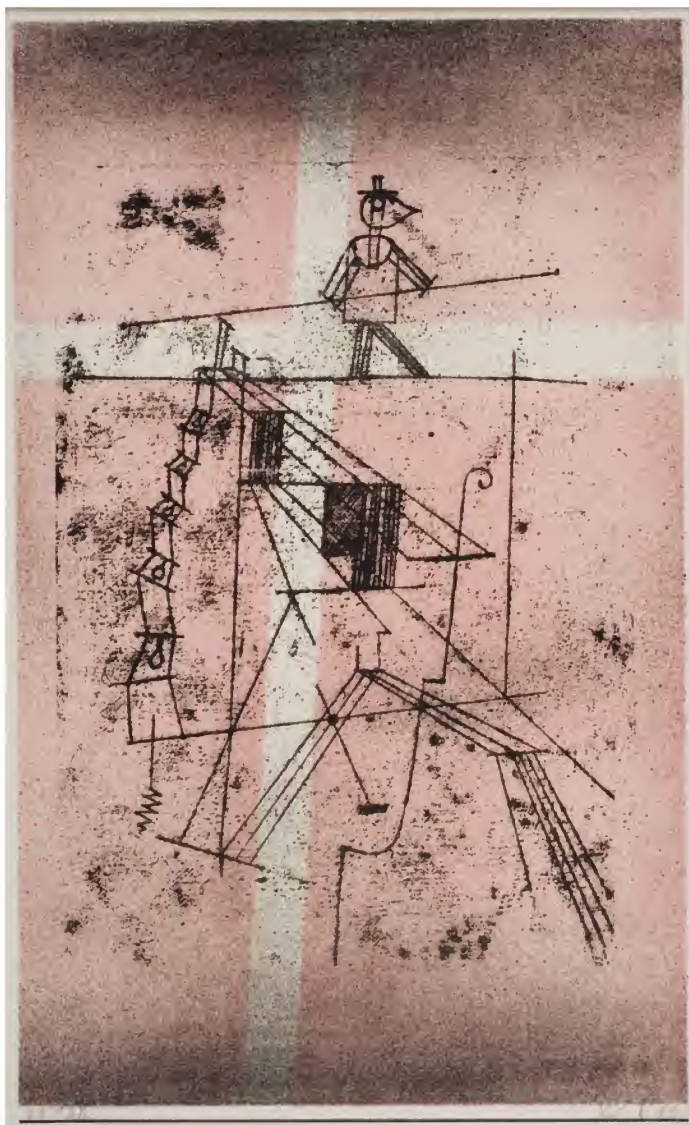


19. *The Fish (Der Fisch)*, 1918/185

Pen on paper on cardboard, 10.6 x 21.9 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 391



20. *Tightrope Walker (Seiltänzer)*, 1923/138

Lithograph, 44 x 27.9 cm

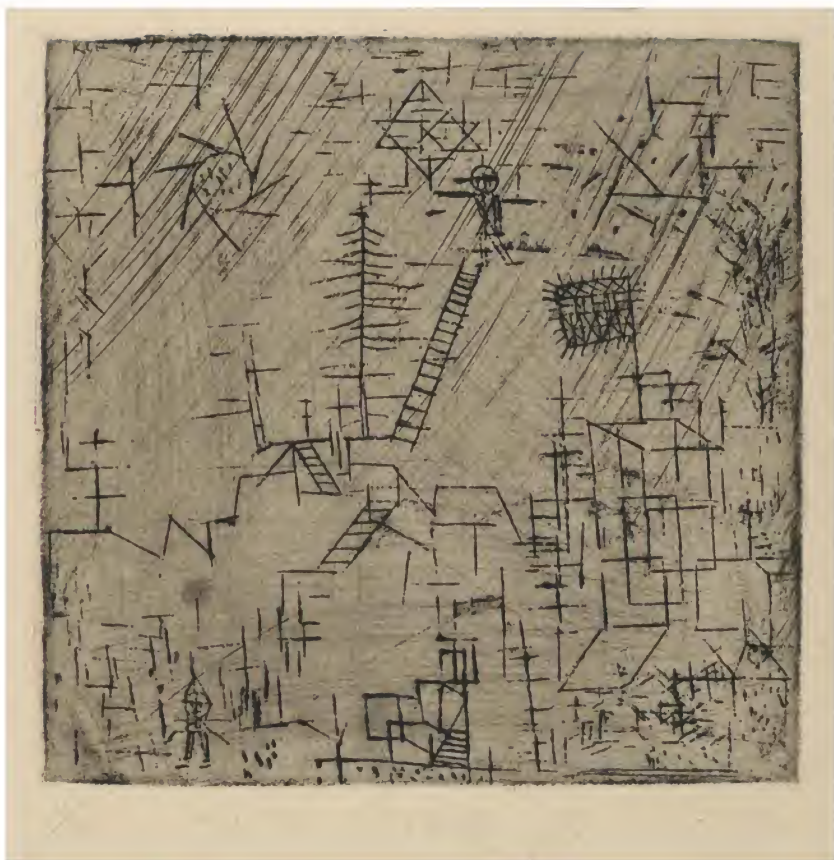
Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA

Museum purchase with funds provided by Wellesley College Friends of Art, 2005.146



21. *Suicide on the Bridge (Selbstmörder auf der Brücke)*, 1913/100

Pen on paper on cardboard, 15.8 x 11.5 cm
 Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum
 Bequest of Betty Bartlett McAndrew, 1986.468

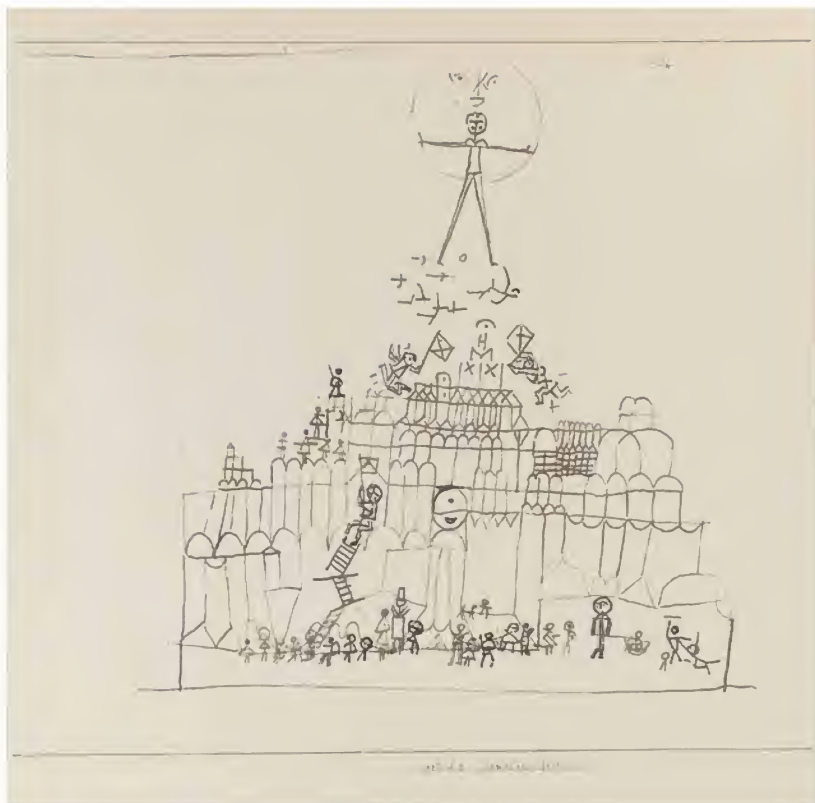


22. *Entertainer in April (Gaukler im April)*, 1928/197

Etching, 19 x 19.5 cm

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum

William M. Prichard Fund, M12842

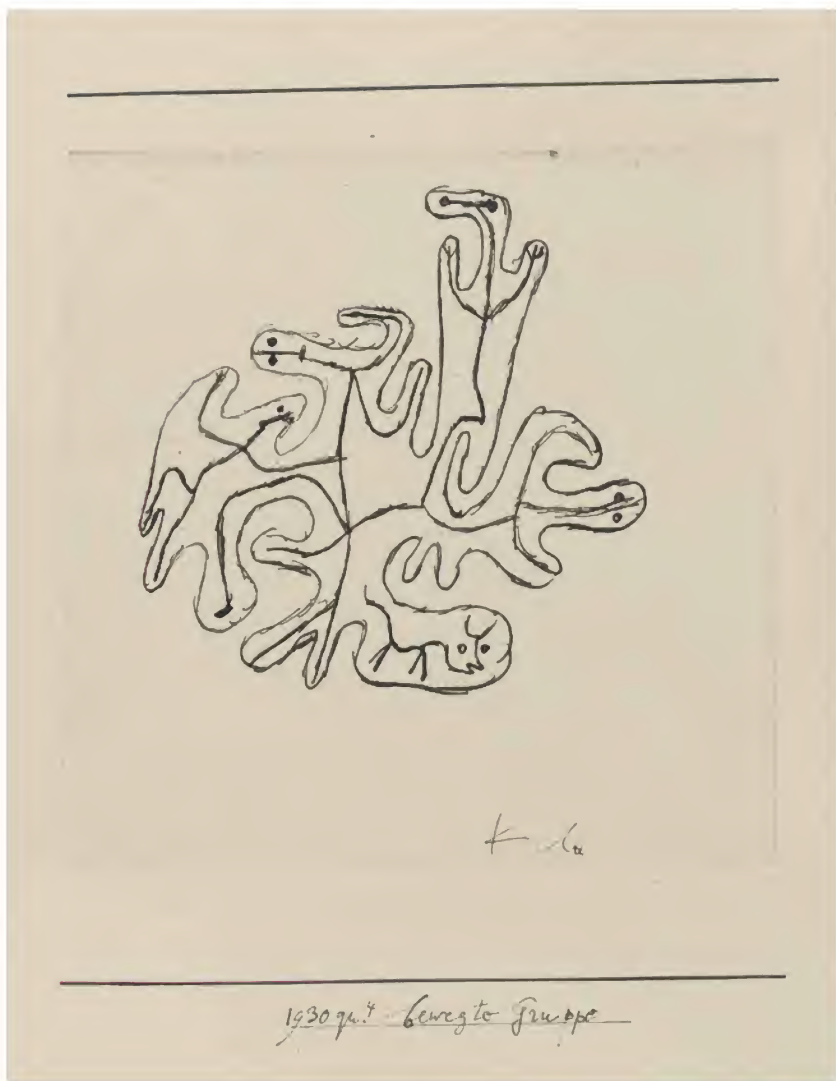


23. *Entertainer Festival (Gaukler-fest)*, 1932/169

Pen on paper on cardboard, 50 x 61 cm

Harvard Art Museums/Fogg Museum

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Alfred Jaretzki, Jr., 1962.194



24. *Group in Motion (bewegte Gruppe)*, 1930/74

Pen on paper on cardboard, 12.2 x 12.2 cm

Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum

Anonymous gift in memory of W. R. Koehler, BR60.29



25. *Flight (Flucht)*, 1940/121

Pen on paper on cardboard, 21.4 x 27 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 2144

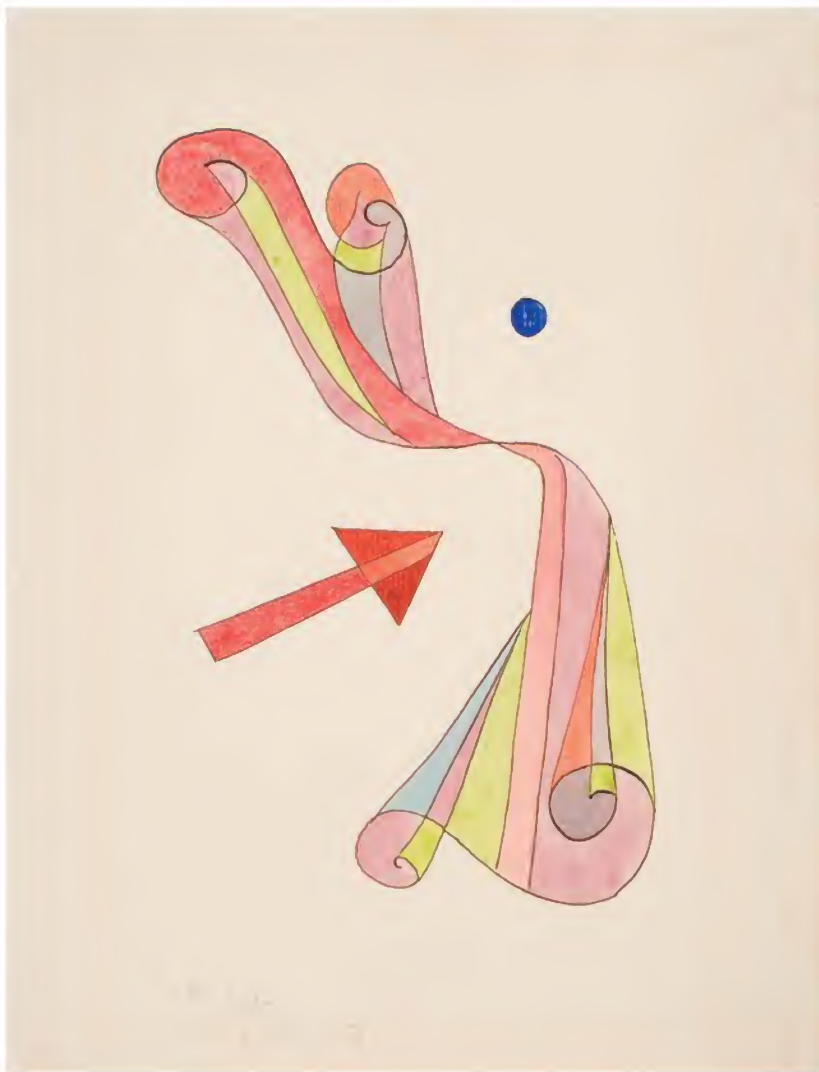


26. *Untitled (Ohne Titel)*, c. 1937

Pastel on paper, 15.2 x 32.5 cm

Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA

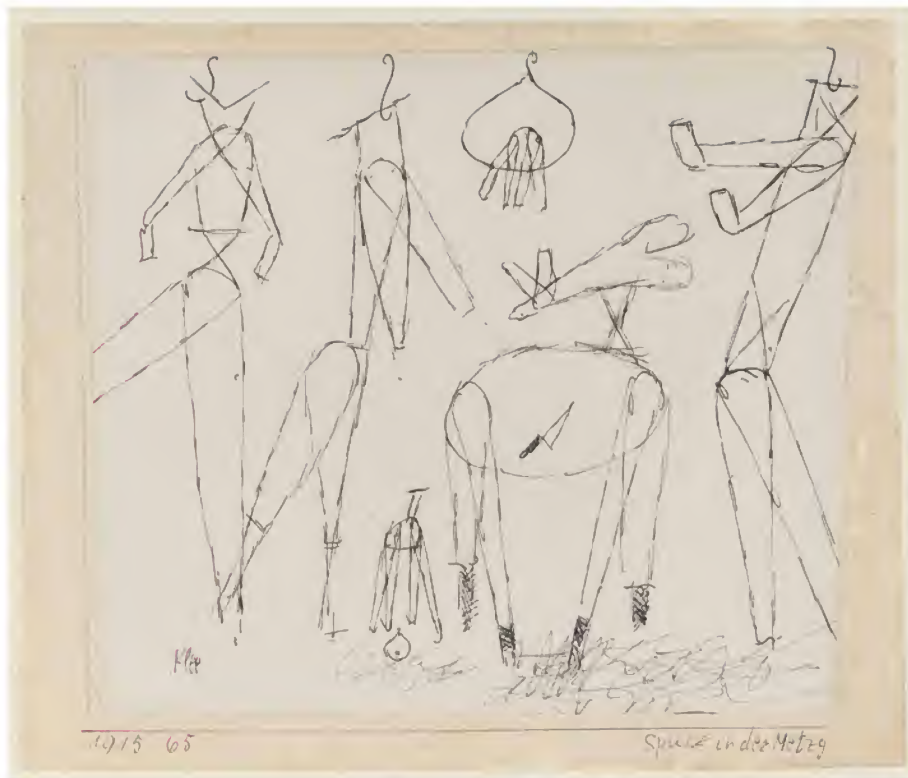
Gift of Mr. Theodore Racoosin, 1956.15



27. Attributed to Paul Klee, *Geometric Spiral* (*geometrische Spirale*), 1927

Pen, ink, and watercolor on paper, 22.9 x 17.9 cm

Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA
The Dorothy Braude Edinburg (Class of 1942) Collection, 1960.55



28. *Spook in the Butcher's Shop (Spuck in der Metzger)*, 1915/65

Pen on paper on cardboard, 12 x 13.3 cm
Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum
Gift of Virginia Herrick Deknatel, BR78.1



29. *Medley of Little People (allerlei kleines Volk)*, 1932/114

Pen on paper on cardboard, 31.2 x 48.3 cm

Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Osborn (Elodie Courter, Class of 1933), 1991.115

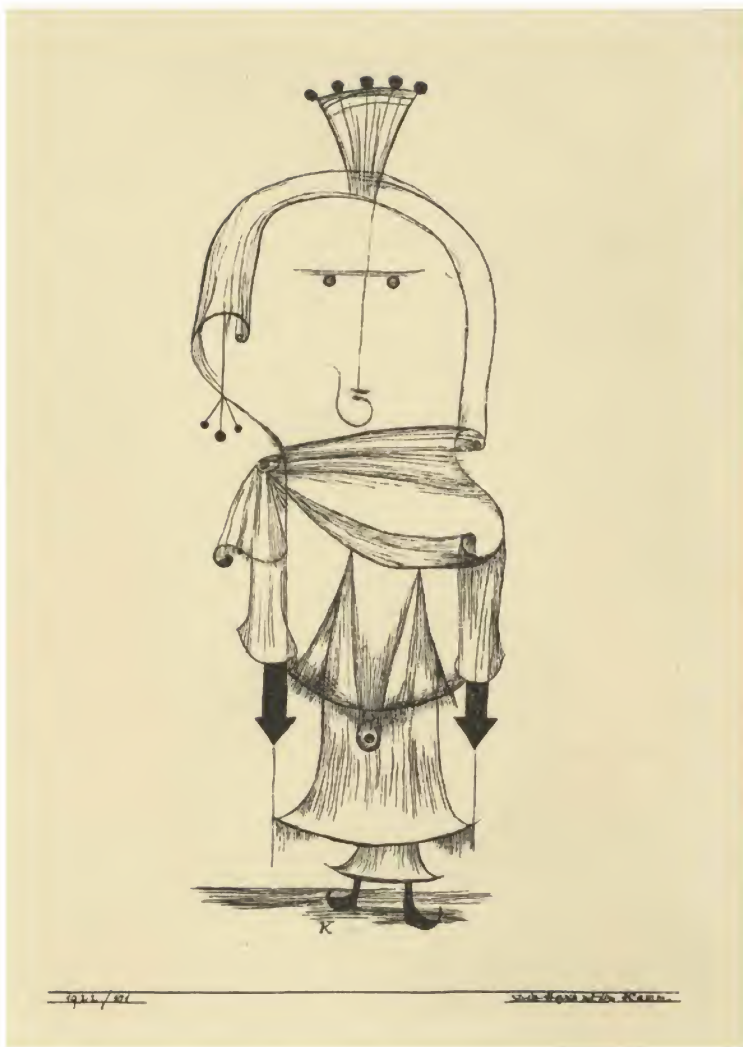


30. *The Moon as Toy (der Mond als Spielzeug)*, 1940/140

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 29.7 x 21 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Livia Klee Donation, SLK Z 2619



31. *The Witch with a Comb (Die Hexe mit dem Kamm)*, 1922/101

Lithograph, trial proof, 28.8 x 21 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

George Peabody Gardner Fund, 53.486

Photograph © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



32. *Nomad Mother (Nomaden-Mutter)*, 1940/248

Colored paste and chalk on paper on cardboard, 29.4 x 20.6 cm

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

Otis Norcross Fund, 56.104

Photograph © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



33. *Chosen Boy (Auserwählter Knabe)*, 1918/115

Pen and watercolor on primed linen on cardboard, 18.7 x 15.2 cm

Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, MA

Anonymous loan, MH 2004.13.6



34. *Small World (Kleinwelt)*, 1914/120

Etching, 14.3 x 9.6 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, NY

Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Fund, 403.1941



35. *Serpent's Prey (Schlangenbeute)*, 1926/21

Pen on paper on cardboard, 24.3 x 31.6 cm
Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

John H. and Ernestine A. Payne Fund, 59.199

Photograph © 2012 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston



36. *Printed Sheet with Pictures (Bilderbogen)*, 1937/133

Oil on canvas, 60 x 56.5 cm

The Phillips Collection, Washington, DC

0999



37. *Scherzo with Thirteen* (*Das Scherzo mit der Dreizehn*), 1922/124

Oil transfer drawing, watercolor, ink, and pencil on paper on cardboard, 27.9 x 35.9 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, NY

Purchase, 139.1951



38. *Musical Ghost (Musikalisches Gespenst)*, 1940/32

Pen on paper on cardboard, 29.6 x 21 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 2087



39. *Man with a Tuba (Mann mit Tuba)*, 1929/213

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 32.9 x 21 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 719

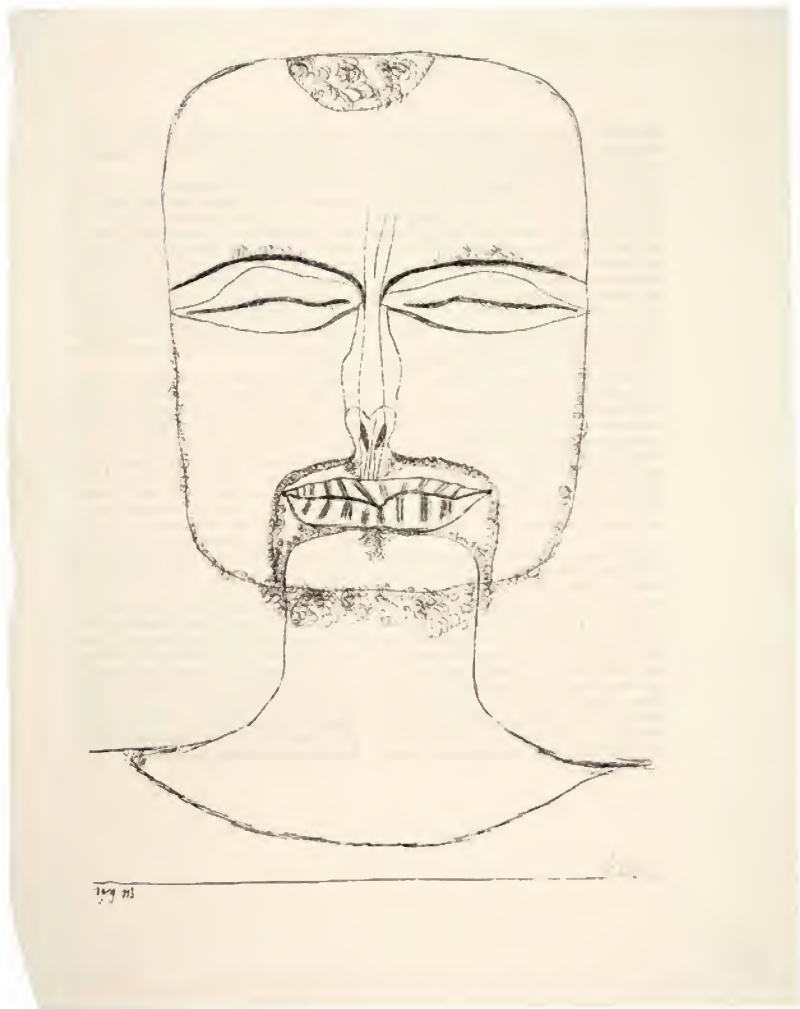


40. *Concert on the Branch (Konzert auf dem Zweig)*, 1921/188

Pen on paper on cardboard, 28.2 x 22 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 469



41. *Absorption (Versunkenheit)*, 1919/113

Lithograph, 27 x 19.5 cm

Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA

Gift of Professor and Mrs. John McAndrew, 1955.4



42. *No! (Nein!)*, 1940/39

Pen on paper on cardboard, 29.5 x 20.8 cm
Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA
Anonymous gift, 1971.26



43. *Stick It Out! (durchhalten!)*, 1940/337

Pastel on paper on cardboard, 29.6 x 20.9 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 2234



44. Last Word in the Drama (letztes Wort im Drama), 1938/39

Pen on paper on cardboard, 21.5 x 27 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Livia Klee Donation, SLK Z 2475



45. *A Gate (ein Tor)*, 1939/911

Tempera on primed paper on cardboard, 31.6 x 14 cm

Fondation Beyeler, Riehen/Basel

Inv.66.1



46. Violence (Gewalt), 1933/138

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 17.1 x 20.9 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1025



47. *Accusation in the Street (Anklage auf der Strasse)*, 1933/85

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 16.9 x 25 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 985



48. *Manhunt (Intimate Scene) (Menschenjagd [intime Scene])*, 1933/123

Pencil on paper on cardboard, 20.2 x 32.4 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1014



49. *Manhunt (Menschenjagd)*, 1933/115

Pencil on paper on cardboard, 23.2 x 32.3 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1007



50. *Double Murder (Doppel mord)*, 1933/211

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 32.9 x 20.9 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1070



51. *Barbarian Mercenary (Barbaren-Söldner)*, 1933/145

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 20.9 x 32.9 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1030



52. *Militarism of Witches (militarismus der Hexen)*, 1933/329

Pencil on paper on cardboard, 23.2 x 27.3 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1100



53. *The Work of Art (das Kunstwerk)*, 1933/154

Pencil on paper on cardboard, 23.8 x 19.8 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Livia Klee Donation, SLK Z 2414



54. *Emigrating (auswandern)*, 1933/181

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 32.9 x 21 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 1048



Pablo Picasso 1904/14

55. Comedian (*Komiker*), 1904/14

Etching and aquatint, 15.3 x 16.8 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, NY

Purchase, 331.1941



56. *Candide*, Chapter 24 (*Candide to Martin: You will at least allow that these people are happy*) (*Candide à Martin: vous m'avouerez du moins, que ces gens-ci sont heureux*), 1911/87

Pen on paper on cardboard, 10.6 x 23.3 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 186



57. *Candide*, Chapter 30 ("From time to time, Pangloss would say to Candide: There is a chain of events...etc.") ("et Pangloss disait quelquefois à Candide: tous les événements...etc."), 1912/12

Pen on paper on cardboard, 15.7 x 23.1 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 197



58. View of St. Germain (*Ansicht v. St. Germain*), 1914/41

Watercolor on paper on cardboard, 23 x 28.4 cm

Columbus Museum of Art, OH

Gift of Howard D. and Babette L. Sirak, the Donors to the Campaign for Enduring Excellence, and the Derby Fund, 1991.001.033



59. To Make Visible (*sichtbar machen*), 1926/66

Pen on paper on cardboard, 11 x 30.3 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

Livia Klee Donation, SLK Z 2339

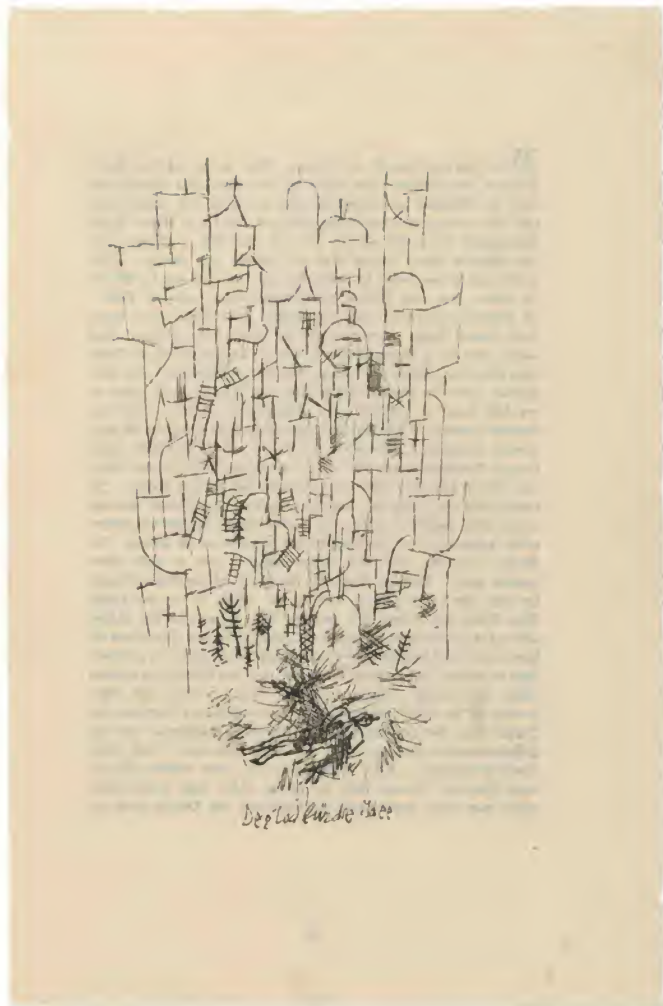


60. *Eidola: Erstwhile Philosopher* (ΕΙΔΩΛΑ: *weiland Philosoph*), 1940/101

Chalk on paper on cardboard, 29.7 x 21 cm

Zentrum Paul Klee, Bern

PKS Z 2128

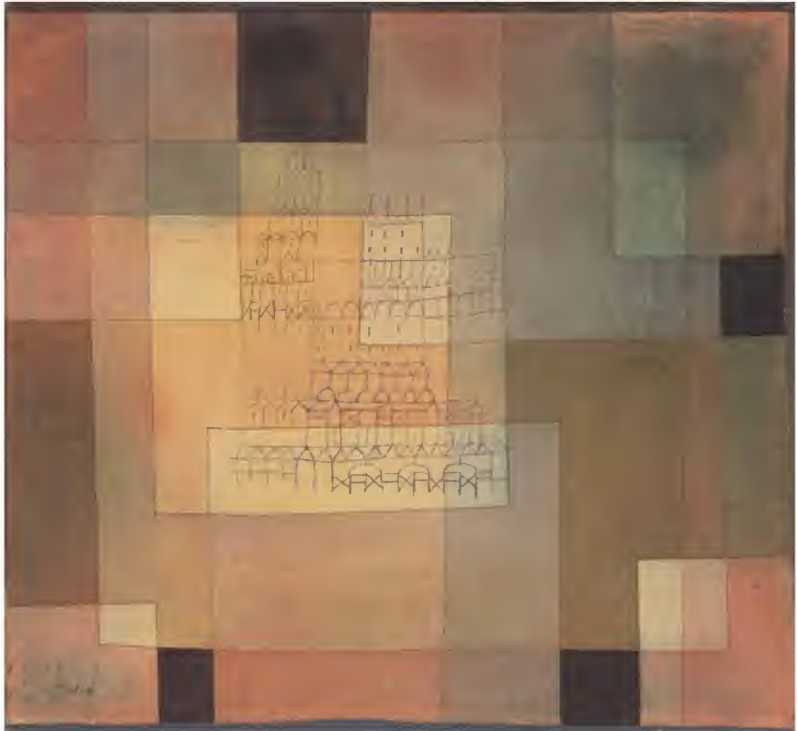


61. *Death for the Idea (Der Tod für die Idee)*, 1915/1

Ink on paper, 23.9 x 15.8 cm

Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum

Museum purchase, BR52.11



62. *Polyphonic Architecture (polyphone Architektur)*, 1930/130

Watercolor and pen on cotton on canvas, 42.5 x 46.5 cm

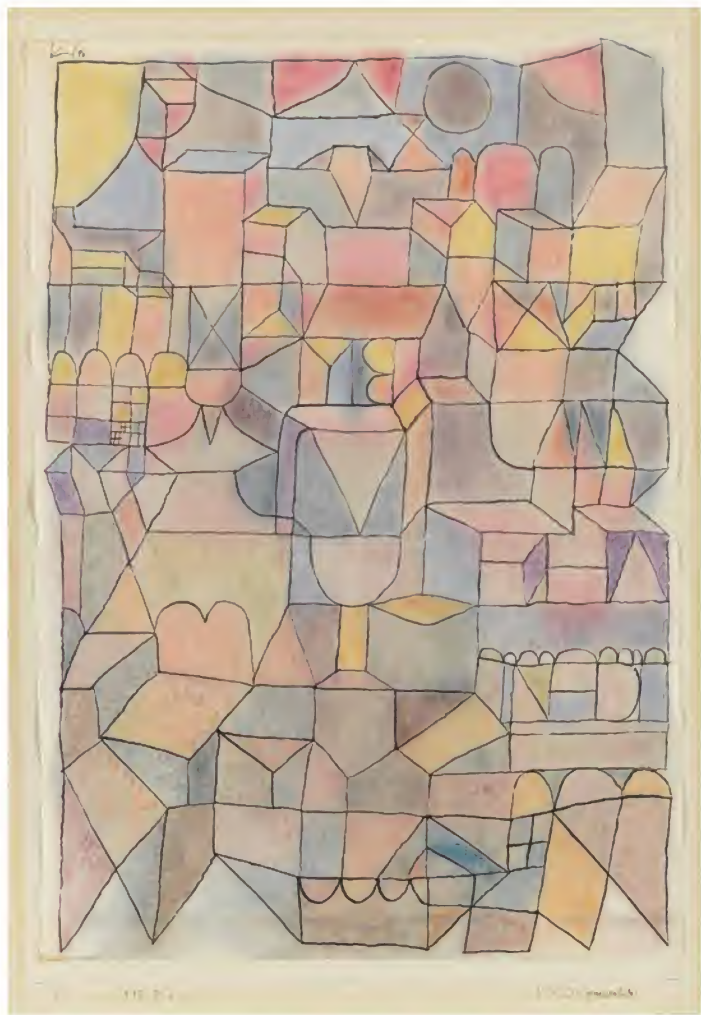
Saint Louis Art Museum

Museum purchase, 9:1942



63. *Roofs (After an Impression near the Milch Haus) (Dächer [nach e. Impr. beim Milchhäus])*, 1915/131

Watercolor on paper on cardboard, 21.6 x 14.3 cm
Mount Holyoke College Art Museum, South Hadley, MA
Anonymous loan, MH 2004.L3.5



64. N. H. D (*Province En-Aitch-Dee*) (N. H. D. [*provinz enhade*]), 1932/247

Watercolor on paper on cardboard, 50.6 x 35.7 cm

Harvard Art Museums/Busch-Reisinger Museum

Bequest of Virginia H. Deknatel in memory of Frederick Brockway Deknatel, 2009.4



65. *The Sublime Side*, postcard for "Bauhaus Exhibition Weimar 1923" (*Die erhabenen Seite, Postkarte zur "Bauhaus Ausstellung Weimar 1923"*), 1923/47

Lithograph, 14.3 x 7.4 cm

The Museum of Modern Art, NY

Purchase, 336.1942



66. *City of Cathedrals (Stadt der Kathedralen)*, 1927/58

Pen on paper on cardboard, 30.5 x 46.4 cm

Davis Museum and Cultural Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA

Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Robert C. Osborn (Elodie Courter, Class of 1933), 1991.116

Index

A

- abstract expressionism, 124
- abstract painting, 91
- Adorno, Theodor, 66, 112, 121
- Aristotle, 55, 80–81, 152–153, 188–194
- art
 - as deformation/distortion, 15, 17, 26, 30, 39, 59, 92, 105, 136, 137, 138, 146, 150, 152
 - as genesis, 80–81, 140–142
 - as spatial, 32, 57, 58, 67, 80–81, 94, 100, 103, 104, 136, 137, 142, 145, 183–184, 192, 194
 - as temporal, 18, 32, 58, 63–66, 80–81, 100, 135, 136, 142, 145, 183, 192
 - future of, 21, 63
- artist, the
 - imminent vs. transcendent, 157–163
 - way of life, 37
- Augustine, 188, 191

B

- Bach, Johann Sebastian, 75, 94, 186
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, 75
- Benjamin, Walter, 19, 46, 66–73, 76, 186
- Bergson, Henri-Louis, 187, 189
- Blaue Reiter, Der, 105, 138
- Boethius, 188

C

- Cassirer, Ernst, 190–192
- Cézanne, Paul, 86, 138–139, 141–142
- childhood/childlike, 18, 46, 105, 116, 124, 131–133, 154, 161, 170, 171, 172
- color theory, 32, 91, 138–140

- concepts, limitations of, 19, 103, 150, 153
- cubism, 16, 135, 136–137, 143, 171, 187–189, 192, 194

D

- Deleuze, Gilles, 37, 43, 94
- Duchamp, Marcel, 173, 184

E

- Einstein, Albert, 189, 194
- expressionism, 105, 106, 136, 165
 - vs. impressionism, 135–148

F

- Feuerbach, Ludwig, 184
- form vs. forming, 15, 27–28, 30, 49, 81–82, 86, 150–151

G

- Gadamer, Hans-Georg, 80–81, 83, 186
- gesture, 125–126, 128–131
- Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von, 48, 52, 85, 90–91, 92, 139, 178
- Gogh, Vincent van, 46, 67
- ground, 16, 38, 89, 101, 159, 162–163

H

- Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, 46, 55, 59, 82, 188
- Heidegger, Martin, 17–18, 20–21, 38–43, 47, 48, 81–82, 135, 153, 189–196
- hieroglyphs, 112, 116, 119, 121, 126
- Hölderlin, Friedrich, 152
- human evolution, 87

264 I

impressionism, 89, 103, 135–148, 186–187
invisible, the, 17, 35, 37, 42, 52, 89, 172, 186, 195
 made visible, 16, 22, 23, 32, 33, 38–39, 48, 78–79,
 81–82, 100, 101, 150, 153, 162, 165

K

Kandinsky, Wassily, 19, 36, 59, 81–82, 103, 105, 138, 139,
166, 170

Kant, Immanuel, 56, 188–189, 193–194

Klee, Paul

 as musician, 93

 as teacher, 40, 49–50

 attributed to

Geometric Spiral, 29, 32, 146, 162, **225**

 works

Absorption, 37, 79, 158, 170–171, **239**

Accusation in the Street, 29, 39, 146, **245**

Ad Marginem, 47, 102, 104, 111, 116–117

Ad Parnassum, 144

Aged Phoenix, 136

Agricultural Experimental Layout for Late Fall, 31, 73,
 204

Äliup, 29, 32, **205**

Alphabet I, 124–125

Angel and the Distribution of Presents, The, 120

Angels, 137

Angel's Care, 196

Angelus Novus, 19, 20, 46, 66

Apparatus for the Magnetic Treatment of Plants,
 177–178

Arabian Bride, 71

Area of High Spirits, 145

Arrival of the Jugglers, 62

At the Blue Bush, 46

Barbarian Mercenary, 29, 30, 39, 146, **249**

Bavarian Don Giovanni, The, 108

Before the Gates of Kairouan, 138

Bewitched and in a Hurry, 184

Blue Flower, 47–48

Both of Them, 47, **210**

Boy in Fancy Dress, 144

Brewing Witches, 182

Candide, Chapter 24, 107, **254**

Candide, Chapter 30, 47, 107, **254**

Carpet of Memory, 63–66

Cat and Bird, 49

Cathedral, 62

Child Consecrated to Suffering, 112–113, 118

Chosen Boy, **231**

City of Cathedrals, 102, 109, 161, **262**

Clouds over BOR, 75

Collection of Doves, 17, **208**

Collection of Figurines, **211**

Comedian, **253**

 (*Composition with Symbols*), 104, 163, **209**

Concert on the Branch, 27, 39, 96, **238**

Cosmic and Earthly Time, 188

Dance, Monster to my Soft Song!, 179–180

Death and Fire, 18, 47, 57, 118

Death for the Idea, 146, 163, **257**

Double Murder, 39, **248**

Drawing Knotted in the Manner of a Net, 110, 119

Dummies, 61

Dynamic Density, 115

Eidola: Erstwhile Cannibal, Man-Eater, 151

Eidola: Erstwhile Philosopher, 2, 147, 151, **256**

Embrace, 124

Emigrating, 39, 81, 146, **252**

Entertainer Festival, 39, 160, **221**

Entertainer in April, 39, 146, 160, **220**

Fig Tree, 88–89

Fish, The, **217**

Fleeing Ghost, 174–175

Flight, 30, 81, 147, 159, **223**

Flora on the Rocks, 145

Flowers in Stone, 119

From Gliding to Rising, 41, 95, 102, 146, 159, **216**

Fugue in Red, 94

Garden in St. Germain, the European Quarter of Tunis,
 138

Gate, A, 21, 102, **243**

Ghost Chamber with the High Door (New Version),
 172–173

Gray Man and the Coast, The, 95

Green Terrain, 38, 81, 104, **199**

Group in Motion, 50, 78, 161, **222**

Handbill for Comedians, 112, 145

Hardly Still Walking, Not Yet Flying, 17, 18, 30, 41,
 83, 146, 159, **213**

*Harmony of Quadrilaterals in Red, Yellow, Blue, White,
 and Black*, 143

Height!, 17

Hero with the Wing, The, 165

Heroic Roses, 20

Heroic Strokes of the Bow, 94

High and Shining Stands the Moon, 108–109

Highway and Byways, 143

Hyperculture of Dynamo-radiolators 1, 20, 21

I-You-Earth-World, 17, 158

Illuminated Leaf, 90

In the Kairouan Style, 138

Individualized Measurement of Strata, 143

Infernal Park, The, 176

Inscription, 74

Insects, 163, **201**

- Inventions, 136–137
- Jester in a State of Trance, 183
- Kettledrummer, 92, 94, 126–132, 145
- Landscape near E (in Bavaria), 111
- Landscapely-physiognomic, 89
- Last Word in the Drama, 29, 147, 151, **242**
- Late Evening Looking Out of the Woods, 33, **206**
- Little Tree, 28–29, 37, 79, 89, 91, 102, 161, **207**
- Lone Fir Tree, 89
- L-Platz under Construction, The, 75
- Lump Spirits, Wisp Spirits and Light Spirits (the Last Very Fragmentary), 166–167
- Man with a Tuba, **237**
- Manhunt, 29, 39, 40, 146, **247**
- Manhunt (Intimate Scene), 40, **246**
- Materialized Ghosts, 172
- Medley of Little People, 40, 102, **227**
- Militarism of Witches, 39, 184, **250**
- Monument in Fertile Country, 143
- Moon as Toy, The, **228**
- Moonrise over St. Germain, 142
- More Bird, 17, 102
- Mr. Death, 167–168
- Musical Ghost, 95, **236**
- N. H. D (Province En-Aitch-Dee), 31, 75, 163, **260**
- Nol, 41, 147, **240**
- Nomad Mother, **230**
- Old Fiddler, 126, 127
- Once Risen from the Gray of Night, 108–109
- Order of High C, The, 112
- Pandora's Box as Still Life, 47
- Park near Lu[cerne], 87, 88, 114
- Pastorale (Rhythms), 120
- Perception of an Animal, 38, **202**
- Phantom's Oath, 173, 175
- Polyphonic Architecture, 31, 32, 73, 94, 196, **258**
- Polyphonic Currents, 46
- Polyphony of Surfaces and Lines, 196
- Printed Sheet with Pictures, 27, 30, 33, 54, 163, **234**
- Racing Somnambulist, 176
- Ragged Ghost, 174–175
- Rhine at Duisburg, The, 114
- Rhythmical, 96, 141
- Rhythmical, Stricter and Freer, 96
- Rider Unhorsed and Bewitched, 181–183
- Roofs (After an Impression near the Milch Haus), **259**
- Saint from a Window, 21
- Scales of Twilight, The, 32–33, 39, 114, 149, 163, **203**
- Scherzo with Thirteen, 95, 162, **235**
- Sea-Snail King, 96
- Semi-circle with Angular Features, 144
- Serpent's Prey, 118–119, **233**
- Small World, 40, **232**
- Somnambulant Dancer, 179
- Soul Departs, The, 175–176
- Specter of a Warrior, 173
- Spellbound Lightning, 183
- Spirit of a Letter, 175–176
- Spiritualist Catastrophe, 169
- Spook in the Butcher's Shop, 167–168, **226**
- Starving Spirits, 168, 174–175
- Stick It Out!, 29, 147, **241**
- Striding Man, 86
- Sublime Side, The, 31, **261**
- Suicide on the Bridge, 27, 151, 163, **219**
- Superior Bird, 17, 41, 147, **214**
- Swinging, Polyphonic (and in Complementary Repetition), 196
- Tablet of a Young Forest, 62
- Through a Window, 81–82
- Tightrope Walker, 17, 39, 46, 133, 146, 156, 160, **218**
- Time, The, 47
- To Make Visible, 38, 57, 79, 100, 102, 108, 112, 117, 162, **255**
- Twittering Machine, The, 95–96, 180–181
- Two Men Meet, Each Supposing the Other to Be of Higher Rank, 136
- Uneven Flight, 17, 41, 102, 147, 159, **212**
- Untitled (c. 1937), 38, **224**
- Untitled (Grassy Slope Seen through Trees), 89
- Untitled (Landscape with Pond), 89
- Untitled (Last Still Life), 92
- Untitled (Single Tree on a Hill), 89
- Untitled (Still Life), 119
- View of St. Germain, 138, **255**
- Villa R, 113, 114, 115
- Violence, 30, 39, 146, **244**
- Wall Plant, 2, 7–8, 29, 32, **200**
- Waterbirds, **215**
- Weathered Mosaic, 70, 74
- WI (In Memoriam), 117
- Winged Hero, 136
- Witch with a Comb, The, 182, **229**
- Witches' Sabbath, 182–183
- Work of Art, The, 39, **251**
- Young Tree (Chloranthemum), 89
- writings
- Bauhaus courses, 28, 40, 43, 81–82, 139, 143, 145, 146
- "Creative Credo," 49, 79–80, 89, 91–92, 93, 97
- Nature of Nature, The, 49, 88–89
- "On Modern Art," 9–14, 25, 89, 92
- Pedagogical Sketchbook, 152, 154
- Tagebücher, 49
- Thinking Eye, The/Das bildnerische Denken, 85, 89, 140
- "Ways of Studying Nature," 89
- Kooning, Willem de, 91

L

language, 25–27, 57, 105–134
 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, 56, 57–58, 100, 183
 line, the, 22–23, 28–29, 31, 46, 53, 86, 100, 107, 115, 137,
 146–147, 151, 154, 155, 161–162, 192–194
 Lyotard, Jean-François, 196

M

Marc, Franz, 16, 49, 93, 105, 138, 140, 157–158, 166, 169
 Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 21–22, 39, 52, 58, 60, 85–97, 138,
 193
 Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus, 93–94, 186
 music, 27, 32, 46, 51, 54, 58, 85, 93–98, 112, 113, 117, 129,
 135–148, 151, 162, 185–186, 188, 192, 194

N

Nazism, 126, 130, 132, 146, 184
 neuroscience, 113–119, 121–123
 Newton, Isaac, 189
 Nietzsche, Friedrich, 58, 153
 Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), 47–54, 55, 60

O

outsider art, 131

P

physis, 48, 55, 81, 160
 Picasso, Pablo, 71, 188–189
 Plato, 35, 36, 55, 93, 152
 Platonism, 86
 point, the, 28–29, 31, 46, 53, 155
 pointillism, 32, 82–83

R

rhythm, 94–95, 96–97, 136–137, 140–147
 Ricoeur, Paul, 192
 Rilke, Rainer Maria, 36, 77–80, 142
 romanticism, 90, 92–93, 160–161
 Ruskin, John, 64, 65

S

Saussure, Ferdinand de, 121
 Schelling, Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph, 49, 90, 150, 152
 Schopenhauer, Arthur, 169
 simultaneity, 26–27, 32, 57, 58, 63, 94, 141, 145, 155, 171,
 174, 183, 185–196
 Socrates, 18, 35

T

technology, 21, 72, 192
 temporality, 185–196
 Thoreau, Henry David, 91, 129

V

Valéry, Paul, 92

W

word and image, 56, 107, 108, 111, 127, 149, 151, 152, 174
 word as image, 58
 writing, 38, 55–56, 102, 107–108, 113–123, 150–151

Z

Žižek, Slavoj, 194

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