Tradition, Innovation, Wholeness, and the Future in the Art of Paul Klee

By

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Upon seeing a tree:
the little birds excite envy,
they shun
thinking about trunk and roots
and have self-satisfied fun all day
with their swinging
nimbly on the newest-sprouted twigs, and
singing.

(Paul Klee, Diaries, no. 466, p. 132, 1902)

Open thyself, thou gate in the depths,
Cell underground, release me
who senses light.
And bright hands come and seize me,
and friendly words are spoken joyously:
Forth, you beautiful pictures, wild beasts,
spring forth from thy cage
that fingers may glide lovingly
on flaming hide.
And all is one as once in God's garden:
day and night,
and sun and splendor of stars.
(In the paradise of those trembling with poetry).

(Paul Klee, Diaries, no. 863, p. 239, 1909)
INTRODUCTION

Paul Klee invented a painterly idiom which is still rich in possibilities for painters of the twentieth and twenty-first century. He brought a wholeness of vision into an avant-garde art which sometimes seems characterized by forms and expressions of alienation and separation. His art consistently reconciled oppositions, holding polarities together in a vital tension—polarities like abstraction and figuration, abstract form and old-fashioned romantic content, "primitive" execution and sophisticated, serious literary references, satirical treatment and classical subject matter; "musical" color field painting and irreverent linear counterpoints. The way of seeing and working he developed produced—and still can produce—unlimited varieties of styles, forms, and innovations, unified in a coherent world view which renders them communicative, even when "abstract."

Klee was an heir to the tradition of eighteenth and late nineteenth century German Romanticism: the former in its literary and philosophical manifestations, the latter in its painterly outworkings. He transformed this tradition into a visual idiom which both appeals to the avant garde in the twentieth century and by its nature points to possibilities for painters in a fragmented "post-modern" culture. The ideas of the Romantics are thus translated into a new formal tongue and effectively carried forward to take shape(s) in a new world.

Klee's major structural sources, besides the late eighteenth century philosophical and literary movement around F. and W. Schlegel, Fichte, Novalis and Tieck, includes eighteenth century Viennese polyphonic music, especially that of Mozart; the writings of Goethe and Schiller; nineteenth century organicism or biological thinking, as expressed in aesthetic theory and in the Jugendstil; the writings of Hebbel; and late nineteenth century romanticist German painting, including the works of Stuck, the Naturlyrismus style and the Dachau school. German Romanticism as
a historical confluence of visual, musical, dramatic and literary currents refers to a panoply of themes and motifs: irony, pathos, fantasy, the supernatural, cosmic and transcendent longings, reference to the gothic and medieval Christianity, folk art, femininity as redemptive principle, the innocence of childhood, the moon and other celestial bodies as symbols, and nature and natural forms as symbols of a transcendent meta-reality. I have only sketched the contours of the romantic movement in Germany over a century and a half, just enough to show its sounding resonance in the forms of Paul Klee's paintings. Nor is there room here for exhaustive treatment of Klee's oeuvre in this respect; I merely want to trace the threads in his development which originate in these older times, and show something of their effects on Klee's distinctively twentieth century avant garde art. I also hope to suggest how these aspects of Klee's work point in provocative new directions for painters now developing. Besides J. Glaesemer's essay for the MOMA catalogue and the severely limited sources to which he makes reference, I find in the literature no in-depth treatment of the relationship between paul Klee and German Romanticism, nor on Klee's humour or irony. If, as I believe, romantic irony was the central moment in Klee's art, there is much to be done. This paper is an exploration of the direction such research might initially take.

I believe tradition—some kind of continuity—is essential for the preservation of sophisticated culture, even a culture characterized by disjunctures, rebellion, and irony, as is the period of the last eight or ten decades in the west. Yet these very central characteristics of avant garde art seem to mitigate against any continuity between generations of artists, except for new forms resulting from reaction against a prior movement, or

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the fortuitous discovery of the hard-won older wisdom by an individual here or there, who may adopt it wholesale as an anomalous curiosity, or make of it an element in an art of art-historical pastiche, collage or "appropriation." In this context it seems quite an accomplishment for Klee to have translated the basic elements of an entire literary, philosophical, painterly and musical tradition, encompassing almost a century and a half before 1900, into terms understandable, usable and provocative for our time. It is all the more remarkable since on the face of it and without such translation, these eighteenth and nineteenth century musical, literary and painterly forms would likely seem to be utterly outmoded and have nothing to offer the young artist aspiring to contribute something new and useful in the twenty-first century.

But the rich lode of ideas in the German romantic tradition has proved amenable to translation into a radically different idiom which, I believe, has yet to be fully appreciated for its ability to pull together what is fragmented, disparate and polarized in late and postmodern culture. As Klee deployed it, it does so in a way that brings a provisional, but seemingly naturally "grown" ordering out of pictorial elements which in other hands might be merely patched together in art of ironic collage or "sampling." This unique eclecticism, its tense holding together of opposites in twentieth century art and thought in new synthetic symbols, finds its synthesizing power in a cohesive world view. This committed stance centers around love of nature, belief in the ability of symbolic art to reflect something of truth, and a commitment to developing new synthetic symbols with which to communicate, rather than simply expressing the increasing fragmentation and consequent seeming disconnectedness or meaninglessness of modern life. In Klee's case, the centerpiece of this world view was romantic irony, by which he was enabled to do several things throughout his life: firstly, justify his belief in the continuing importance of art in an epigonic, disillusioned age (see ch.2, pp. 20-21); secondly, to hold
himself aloof from the claims of any one artistic ideology, while mastering the forms of the most culturally formative movements of his time (Fauvism, Orphism, Cubism and Constructivism, as well as the ideas and innovations of Kandinsky) and using them all along with folk art, primitive art, children's art and the art of the insane to potentiate the strengths and most interesting possibilities of each; thirdly, to distance himself even from the difficulties of his own life—poverty, uncertainty, financial dependency, war, revolution, bereavement, exile and terminal illness—and make of these catastrophic events not autobiographical expressions nor pathetic illustrations, but potent, new, communicative symbols for impending death, spirituality, love, hypocrisy, duplicity, desire: all the things for which people need to find meaning, or at least adequate symbolic formulation.

Chapters one through five sketch development of Klee's unique project and idiom, roughly chronologically. Chapter one looks at his early formation in its cultural context, with events leading up to the artistic crisis which determined his artistic project and trajectory for life. Chapter two sketches the romantic ideas which were so important in Klee's understanding of his place in life and art, especially irony, organicism, and the perceived analogous relation between art and nature; and at his apprenticeship with past masters while he was still isolated from the European avant-garde. Chapter three treats one twentieth-century artistic polarity—the temporal process of creation vs. the finished art work—which began emerging with Dada. Klee synthesized a new integrity of emphasis on both, via romantic irony, the idea of artistic creation as an analog of natural processes, organicism, Hebbel's ideas of genesis preserved in final form, visual analogs of the structures of polyphonic and contrapuntal music, and poetic or narrative allusivity, along with science-inspired experiments and exercises to link art and nature. He also conceived the idea of a complete masterwork which developed in time and was comprised of thousands of spontaneous fragments, each complete in itself; this is also a romantic
conception synthesizing process and product (which is detailed a bit more in chapter six). Chapter four shows Klee encountering the developing schism between abstract and figurative art early in the twentieth century and synthesizing symbols out of both. His principal means included the "dematerializing" reductions of representations to "minimal allusions," a practice of Kandinsky; subsequent interlacing of figurative elements into abstract compositions; and making metaphors and figurative puns of abstract Cubist and Constructivist forms and techniques. Chapter five looks at three phenomena: Klee's further reconciling of abstraction and figuration by his use of the "abstract" scribbles and schematics of children's art and the ornamental signs of folk and primitive art for figurative, poetic works; his reconciliation of the divided worlds of "primitive" and beaux arts, which others of the avant-garde did not effect consistently; and his final reduction of forms to dense ideograms, as if to create a new language of symbols.

At the conclusion of my sketch of these developments, in chapter six, I will attempt to show how Klee can be seen as a paradigm for tradition-bearing in our time, and also as a model of a certain wholeness of vision and execution. I will also point out some areas of weakness in this model, and make suggestions as to how painters now might modify it.

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2 I will be using "primitive" as James Pierce does: "I have returned to the enthusiastic and richly evocative...use of 'primitive' favored by Klee's revolutionary friends...the term was an affirmative for their own anti-illusionism... 'Primitive' for the Blaue Reiter group meant primary, basic, essential, and was applied to almost any work created outside the Renaissance tradition they rejected." -James Smith Pierce, Paul Klee and Primitive Art, N.Y., New York University, 1976, N.Y.U.'s "Outstanding dissertations in the fine arts," pp.2-3.
CHAPTER ONE:

Klee's early milieu.

In this chapter we'll see how changes in science and the humanities in Europe impacted upon painting at the end of the nineteenth century, and we'll look at Klee's beginnings in that environment.

An absolutized science arose in the eighteenth century, deriving from Kant's separation between sensory nature and the suprasensory realm of human moral freedom.\(^3\) Thereafter nature was increasingly conceived as unrelated to and uninfluenced by any supranatural power, a determined universe to be controlled by natural science and technology. Man\(^4\) was posited as utterly distinct from nature: autonomous, free to explore and impose his will and way on nature, thus achieving his highest freedom. For Kant, the separation between science and faith paralleled that between nature and moral freedom.\(^5\) Science was to gain ground throughout the nineteenth century, claiming not only more and more of natural life but much of what had been thought manifesta-


\(^4\) I will use the somewhat outdated generic "man" and its cognates throughout as more euphonious than "humankind," he/she, him/her, "personhood" and the like. I don't have permission to use my suggested non-gendered generic and personal pronouns: 'man; 'he and che (subject, he or she), h' (direct object, him or her, pronounced as h).

tions of human freedom—political, social and economic life, psychological theory, even Scriptural history and doctrine.6

Analytic knowledge increasingly supplanted belief in the divine,7 but the transcendent ground of nature and human being, which gives life meaning, was not accessible via positivistic or analytic knowledge. So a longing for what was now felt to be unattainable developed—longing for an unmoving, accessible foundation of reality—and this found focus in the arts. This mood characterized German Romanticism after 1800. Faced with the false dilemma of freedom and faith vs. objective knowledge, Romantics were those who (after c. 1800) concentrated on subjective human sensibility and experience.8 In this way they tried to preserve a world view of wholeness, of free human being in continuity with nature and the cosmos, at least imaginatively, through symbolic representations of that universe.9

In the nineteenth century Dilthey made a distinction between the humanities (Geisteswissenschaften) and the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften), between the study of what pertained to nature and what to human culture and freedom.10 But late in the century, the theory of evolution increased its hold on the scientific imagination. The tandem development of historicism and

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6 Dooyeweerd, Roots, pp. 173-4, 85.
7 Ibid, p. 21.
8 Oskar Walzel, German Romanticism, trans. Alma E. Lussky (1931), New York, Frederick Ungar Co., 1965, pp. 41, 47; Rookmaaker, p. 21.

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Comte's positivism led to the rise of various social, economic and psychological theories which purported to explain in a scientific way whole periods of history, the destinies of populations and the highest and deepest moments of the inner life of individuals by reference to mechanical cause and effect. From within such an outlook, human freedom appears to be an illusion. But the human need to feel accountable and free persisted.

Aesthetics alone, of all the human sciences, was not successfully "scientized" nor did it develop a consensus of norms in the twentieth century. The arts became the focus for the realm of "freedom" in the West. Art was seen as uniquely undetermined and mysteriously free. This opened the door for an unprecedented fragmenting and flourishing of different forms of painting. Art was no longer imitatio but rather that sphere of human activity which was truly free. An aesthetics of individual genius and

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12 Dooyeweerd, Roots, pp. 192, 199 ff., 210.
13 "...It has been peculiar to the nineteenth century to try to introduce science everywhere, even where it is least concerned...the natural sciences.... They must...be accused of having made this society lose faith, become earthbound, incapable of thousands of those intellectual or emotional human utterances [of]...devotion ... . They are therefore responsible--as Schiller has already said--for the poorness of our art, which they have assigned exclusively to the domain of imitation, the only quality that can be established by experimental methods. In giving art this end, which is contradictory to art itself,...they [have]...simply suppressed it completely...with the exception of those rare artists who have had the strength to isolate themselves far from this environment with its destructive ideas." -G.-Albert Aurier, from "Essay on a New Method of Criticism," 1890-93, cited in Herschel B. Chipp, Theories of Modern Art, Berkeley, U. of California Press, 1968, p.87.
15 Dooyeweerd, Roots, p. 50.
expression was developed by, among others, Solger, Shelley and Hazlitt. Later in the nineteenth century thinkers and artists like Baudelaire, Delacroix, Schopenhauer and Huysmans provided justification for artists shaken out of definite social roles to turn in upon themselves, abdicating accountability to society, honoring only the aesthetic. Such were the Symbolists, the Decadent Symbolists, artists of the Jugendstil.

As Robert Rosenblum has detailed in *Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition*, nineteenth century northern Romantic painters developed new symbols for a popular omnipresent, omniscient, immanent god most clearly seen in unspoiled nature, the innocence of childhood, and the stars in their untraversable distances. By 1900 the influence of Symbolism on German painting

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16 Rookmaaker, pp. 24-25, 31-32.
17 Ibid, p. 38.
18 Ibid, p. 75-79.
19 Ibid, p. 72-74.

"...the artist always has the right to...deform...according to the needs of the Idea to be expressed. ...the work of art...will be:
1. Ideist, for its unique ideal will be the expression of the Idea.
2. Symbolist, for it will express this Idea by means of forms.
3. Synthetist, for it will present these forms, these signs, according to a method which is generally understandable. [i.e. in natural equivalents]
4. Subjective, for the object will never be considered as an object but as the sign of an idea perceived by the subject.

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had produced a flourishing trade in naturalistically painted allegories and mythical subjects. The Naturlyrismus and Dachau schools painted expressive landscapes, symbolizing the painters' ideas; and the Jugendstil, stepchild of art nouveau, tried to provide abstracted, expressive visual analogs to natural forms.

Klee's advent

Paul Klee (1879-1940) came from a cultured, musical Bernese family but his first lessons were in art. His grandmother, a dress designer and embroiderer, taught him drawing, color and cutout, using magazines and calendars and the dreamlike drawings of The Youngest Roussel. After her death in 1884 Klee found that music was cultivated in the bourgeois household, while drawing was tolerated at best. He became a musical child prodigy, playing violin with the Bern symphony orchestra at age twelve. In 1898, Klee defied his family and enrolled in Heinrich Knirr's Munich academy, although he still had his private doubts as to whether art was a proper vocation.

He was early inspired in a lyric manner by nature and in 1899 Munich that meant landscape painting. He was naturally gifted with graphic line but intimidated by the complexities of color. In his paintings he concentrated on tonality--values of light and dark--and chiaroscuro, after his beloved Leonardo. From 1898 he began producing in the Munich painterly tradition or Naturlyrismus style, best known from the works of the Dachau School, Lenbach, Ludwig Dill and Heinrich Knirr himself, all of whom were heirs to the German Romantic painters Runge and Friedrich. By 1900 he'd mastered the expressive brush work, flat, decorative and rhythmic look. Naturlyrismus was a romantic school

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of emotionally symbolical landscapes, which eschewed the allegory and mythological metaphors of Böcklin et al. For these painters, all of nature could be transformed into symbols or equivalents of their own inner states, so they relied on the objective features—form and color—of nature to express their sometimes violent feelings related to facing a hostile nature. The result was a tragic mode characterized by sentiment, melancholy and anxiety. Klee was a romantic, and passionate. Steeped in German Romantic literature and philosophy, he demonstrated its characteristic restless longing to see what he instinctually felt to be the spiritual/cosmic source of the beauties of nature. He began to feel acutely his inadequacy even to address nature in the traditional ways: What could he or his contemporaries add to the works of Runge, Friedrich, Knirr?

He began to despair of doing justice to nature's "objective features" for any purpose, while trying to copy classical statuary and nude models during his two years at Knirr's and then Franz von Stuck's Munich academy. Klee never drew according to the canons of classical beauty, except for unavoidable class assignments. He was revolted by the imperfections of the human


23 E.g., Klee wrote in his diary during 1905 of depression, demons, prayers, ecstasies and a fear of his own inner chaos of passions. He conceived salvation in terms of something small, manageable, contained. Such would his art be, such his detached approach to life, his own life, sufferings and death. This would make irony a necessity in his art.

"For the time being, a spectator's interest in [his own painful psychic] process keeps me alive and awake. An autobiographical interest. Dreadful, if this were to become an end in itself." -Diaries, no. 693, p. 187 (August 1905.)


"No one has to get ironical about me. I see to that myself." -Ibid, no. 744/45, p. 194 (January 1906).

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models compared to the idealized classical statuary,\textsuperscript{24} and de­
liberately exaggerated the deformations of his figures.

Klee knew nothing of the avant garde in Paris at the turn of the century; he hadn't seen the post-Impressionists or the Nabis. He chose for his exemplars the least sentimental, most formally rigorous among the contemporaries he knew, like his teacher Franz Stuck, popular painter of melodramatic allegories, and sculptor Adolf Hildebrand, strongly classicist in style. In 1903, his diary praised the Danish neoclassical sculptor Bertel Thor­waldsen, a sculptor popular in Germany but not critically ac­
claimed; and the monumental, allegorical Hodler. Hodler favored severe, "classical" compositional order but also expressive color and stylization, as well as metaphysical-mystical content, a combination very intriguing for an artist like Klee, who, as we shall see, desired synthesis of "architectonic and poetic" form as well as (romantic) symbolic transcendence of the visible.\textsuperscript{25} But all these artists in one way or another were working the eighteenth and nineteenth century German Romantic motifs.

Around this time Theodor Lipps was exploring the psychic effects of pure organized lines at the University of Munich, and sculptor/architect Endall was writing about the expressive potential of pure line and proportions. Hoelzel developed his theory of colored forms. In fin-de-siècle Vienna, the new science of psychology made disturbing revelations about the primitive nature of man, even as ethnography and anthropology showed his ancient lineaments. Amongst the avant-garde in Paris, "the primitives," Gauguin, the Fauves and Matisse progressed in their

\textsuperscript{24} Diaries, no. 65, p. 22.

\textsuperscript{25} Beeke Sell Tower, \textit{Klee and Kandinsky in Munich and at the Bauhaus}, Ann Arbor, Michigan, UMI Research Press, 1978, p. 22. Tower notes here also that part of Klee's interest in Hodler may have been due to their common citizenship and the fact that this Swiss artist, uniquely, was acclaimed in both France and Germany.
liberating expressionism. Thus, the elements were in place for the emergence of a completely non-figurative painting. Meanwhile the Munich academy and others labored on under the direction of talented pedants like Franz Stuck, with his melodramatic allegories. Even in Vienna, as psychology began to color the pictures of the Sezession artists, led by Gustav Klimt, the emphasis was still on allegory and mythic or religious subjects.26

In 1895-6 the satirical journals Pan, Jugend and Simplicissimus were founded in Germany, featuring Jugendstil illustrations with solid, flat forms, stylized figures and flowing, biomorphic lines. The new journals were full of the spirit of German idealism and tended to philosophical affectations. They also offered art in the "Decadent" style--Charles Ricketts, Felicien Rops, some of Max Klinger's works, and those of Aubrey Beardsley, whom Klee later much admired, exemplify the style. Decadence was a type of Symbolism characterized by complexity, asymmetry, enigma, and an often agitated or fragmenting surface, caused by dense, de-centered profusions of details or formal linear elements. These works also tended to favor occult, horrific and obscene subject matter.27 Artists whose work Klee admired, like Beardsley, had like him also turned from naturalistic treatment of the human body; but they turned to its extreme stylization. The Decadent depiction of sexually charged violence or perversity was justified by the critics of the day, like Huysmans and Symons, on the grounds that

Beardsley's "sacrifice" was "really the sacrifice to


eternal beauty and only seemingly to the powers of evil... ...because he loved beauty [its] degradation obsesses him."28

Like much of Symbolism, Decadent works were given to literary references and thus, references to the past, while formally striving toward the new and unknown in their agitated innovations and disrespect for traditional forms. In this sense they, too, were romantic in the sense Klee understood the term. The macabre aspect of Symbolism had colored the work of older painters such as Bocklin, as well as contemporaries like Munch, Ensor, and Kubin, and influenced Klee for a while. Its sense of self-mocking, detachment, yearning and frustration would color Klee's work all his life.

To add to his disenchantment with the figure, the eleven month Italian Bildungsreise he took in 1901-2 as part of his Munich education led him to an artistic crisis. He was overwhelmed by the rigor and beauty of Renaissance classicist architecture. And his attention was caught by other marvels, like what he saw as Rodin's "caricatures" on exhibition in Rome, which he liked better than the emotional excesses (for him) of Michelangelo's Pieta, so much that he exclaimed Above all, Rodin's caricatures of nudes!--caricatures! A genre unknown before him.29

Overall, the accomplishments of European art left him "deeply


29 Diaries, no.397/4.13, p. 105 (April 1902).
moved, feeling very small and shaking my head."30

But in addition, Klee was riveted for hours by the living spectacle in the Naples aquarium, where the plethora of colorful, graceful and strange floating creatures in an alien medium impressed him deeply. Yet at this time he had only the methods of naturalism in his repertoire, which were inadequate to the expression of what he experienced there.31 He intuitively felt that nature—and human nature—were his subject matter, but was still groping toward form for them, form not of the past but of his own age, and uniquely his own.

Klee's artistic crisis.

In 1902, after a year in Italy, Klee returned to Germany sunk in gloom. Besides having given up on the classical nude, he dared not return to an innocently emotional, Naturlyrismus response to nature: he now saw this to have been only the tail end of German Romantic painting, and as such, it belonged to the past. He wanted to be of his time.

In earlier days (even as a child), the beauty of landscapes was quite clear to me. A background for the soul's moods. Now dangerous moments occur when Nature tries to devour me; at such times I am annihilated, but

30 Diaries, no. 402, p. 108 (April 1902).

31 Yet the way he described it is, in tone and imagery, not unlike the later pictures he would make of such forms, with their layers of implied, analogical meaning, including human resemblance: "And snakelike monstrosities with poisonous eyes, huge mouths, and pocketlike gullets. Others sit in sand over their ears, like humanity sunk in its prejudice. The vulgar octopi stare out like art-dealers; one in particular eyed me with compromising familiarity, as if I were a new Bocklin and he a second Gurlitt. Niente affari! A gelatinous, angelic little creature (transparent and spiritual) swam on its back with incessant movement, swirling a delicate pennon. The ghost of a sunken steamship. ...A half-year before, the subject matter would have been strange to me, but now I can feel my way into it." -Diaries, no. 390, p. 98 (March 1902).
at peace. This would be fine for old people, but I...  

How could he hope to compete with or add to the glories of European art in a new way?

My Italian trip now lies a month behind me.... . Unfortunately the poetic suffered a great change in me. Tender lyricism turned into bitter satire. I protest. ...The thought of having to live in an epigonic age is almost unbearable.  

(My emphasis.) Klee's dilemma, and the resolution he made of it has to do with the relationship of unseen reality to modern art.

The artist who has striven for perfection of verisimilitude discovers that reality eludes him, transcends his art; and this transcendence puts him in the position in which the religious artist has found himself all along.... . The vigorous, secular, representational art of the nineteenth century, satisfied with the accuracy of its modeling, falls into disfavor.  

That is, Klee like many of his contemporaries knew there was more to reality than what positivistic science could account for. Klee didn't yet have the means to go beyond the forms of what seemed a finished past. Uniquely, he found a way forward into new form by casting back to his roots in the eighteenth century, specifically the German Romantics. He adapted their ideas and formulated a modern idiom which went beyond visible nature to the unseen aspects of reality--what other, less romantic artists called the "spiritual," and he called the "cosmic." How he accomplished this is the subject of chapters two through five.

32 Diaries, no. 421, p. 122 (June 1902).
33 Ibid, no. 429, p. 125 (June 3, 1902).
35 In particular, Hölderin's concept of poetry, Novalis' idea of cosmic unity and Goethe's thought on nature, which I will look at in the next chapter, and in ch. 6.

Chapter One
CHAPTER TWO:

From the Romantics: Irony and organicism.

In this chapter we will see how Klee resolved his artistic crisis and went forward in spite of living in an "epigonic" age, to create with others one of the most exciting and original eras in world art.

Romantic irony

Romantic irony had been developed by German Romantic authors and philosophers, principally Fichte, F. Schlegel, Solger, Tieck, and Novalis. It was a literary form designed to mitigate extreme pathos, to compensate for the great gap between man and the unattainable transcendent Being for whom he longed, that unknowable Being which was the foundation of reality, nature and man. Romantic literature and art was characterized by the tragedy of unfulfillable longing for the ultimate, for the basic, for that which is more basic than life itself and which was humanly unattainable except imaginatively, in art. For the German Romantics, the pathos of human life consisted in the longing for ultimate meaning and satisfaction, which neither natural nor invented pleasures could satisfy. When the pain and pathos of that distance between the individual's life and an imagined...

36 "In Goethe's Meister (2,171,30), [F.] Schlegel thought to discern, behind the veil of poetry, the poet himself smiling with spiritual aloofness upon his creation." - Walzel, p. 231.

cosmic fulfillment or meaning became too intense, irony was introduced, mocking that life and its futile aspirations and emotions. Immediately there was then created an equal distance between self and earthly life—which suddenly seemed positively silly in its smallness relative to that to which the poet aspired. So irony characteristically hovers between two poles: that of the unattainable ultimate human meaning and spiritual satisfaction, and the inescapable, immediate contingencies of daily life, with its tumult and futile longings.

According to Hegel, Romantic irony had its roots in Fichte's philosophy of art, which

set up the...abstract, formal ego...as the absolute principle of all knowing, reason and cognition...

...When the ego that sets up and dissolves everything out of its own caprice is the artist, to whom no content of consciousness appears as absolute and independently real but only as a self-made and destructible show...earnestness can find no place, since validity is ascribed only to the formalism of the ego.

Klee had grown up reading heavily in the German Romantic philosophical and literary tradition. He reached back to this heritage now and found the way out of his epigonic agony, in this very irony which, linked with Goethean thought about art and nature, generated new ways of seeing and of making art for this time.

...The thought of having to live in an epigonic age is almost unbearable. ...Now I try to ignore all this in practice and to build modestly, like a self-taught man, without looking right or left.

He formulated one self-consciously absurd hope: that he as one lone individual, outside both completed cycles of world art

38 Ibid, p. 43.

39 Although the same dualism could be seen in works of the German Romantic painters, they generally did not use irony. —Honor and Fleming, pp. 513-14.

40 Hegel, pp. 64-67.

41 Diaries, no. 429, p. 125 (July 1902).
history (to speak in Hegelian terms, as he evidently did), could yet bring into being a new world of form, one wavering line at a time. This realm would be as important as those created by the multitudes of his brilliant forbears. Thus, absurdly, Klee made himself the very center of his art-historical universe.

How did Klee move from being a tremulous student, faint-heartedly comparing his small talents to the unreachable greatness of Rome and Germany, to attributing enough importance to himself to become the center of his own view of art history and bold enough to begin a new phase of that history?

I believe that he consciously took a decision to live ironically, in order to overcome his epigonic anxiety of influence and make a path for himself, and that he felt acutely that he was compromising himself.

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.²²

(Emphasis mine.)

O individual, you who serve no one, you useless one! Create aims for yourself: Play, delude yourself and others, be an artist.

....The wanderers on the path of art damnedly resemble the vagabonds on the road.⁴³

Demon 692 is stirring again. You must pray: let my soul forget that it errs... ⁴⁴

I copied the foreword to Dorian Gray. Did the same for other thoughts of Oscar Wilde... . . . perhaps true

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²² Diaries, no. 430, pp. 125-6 (July 1902).
³³ Diaries, no. 422, p. 123 (June 1902).
⁴⁴ Ibid, no. 700, p. 188 (August 1905).
after all. Terrible, this: all art is useless.45

Am I God? I have accumulated so many great things in me!...(Aside) They also were not worthy of Him they crucified.46

Maybe I am inclined to perdition, but I am also inclined always to save myself quickly. I don't want anything to grow too big for me, even though I may want to experience it. I simply don't want it. I must be saved.47

A good moment in Oberhofen. No intellect, no ethics. An observer above the world or a child in the world's totality. The first unsplit instant in my life.48

Farewell, this present life that I am leading. You can't remain so. You were distinguished. Pure spirit. Quiet and solitary. Farewell, my honor, as soon as I take my first step in public.49

Klee felt crushed by history, as if everything had been done. He went ahead as an artist, but necessarily in irony. It would be an oeuvre of fragments and small works, full of self-mocking, satirical references to the past, and a dynamic pictorial dialectic of irony synthesizing opposites; in short, very romantic.50

Irony requires contradiction of opposites, even paradox. For Klee the world resolved into polarities. He associated the terms "romantic" and "classical" with, respectively, the subjective, poetic, Christian, feminine, intuitive, dynamic, emotional, otherworldly; and the objective, architectonic, masculine,

48 Ibid, no. 713/14, p. 190 (August 1905).
49 Ibid, no. 725, p. 191 (August 1905).
50 Walzel, p. 24.
rational, static, self-contained, and worldly.\textsuperscript{51} Klee was not content to remain a painter in the traditional romantic realm as he understood it. He sought a new, "cool romanticism," bridging opposites in art and life,\textsuperscript{52} in order to attain a personal synthesis of classical and romantic tendencies, of 'architectonic and poetic' painting \textit{within the framework of contemporary form}.\textsuperscript{53} Romantic irony in the hands of this painter also enabled a protean art uncommitted to a single style, constantly synthesizing and moving on to the next opposition.

Finally, by developing the romantic conception of the transcendent origin of nature and art working through him as an ironic artist (derived from Goethe, Fichte, Herder and Schelling),\textsuperscript{54} Klee was also able to rationalize his self-importance. Hebbel thought of the artist romantically, as a medium in whom

\begin{quote}
\ldots creation happens\ldots unconsciously and intuitively, and the artist is only the instrument for transformation.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

Klee, 1918, echoed this thought:

"My hand has become the obedient instrument of a remote will."\textsuperscript{56}

That generative source, which Klee believed to be the same as that working through nature to create her forms, he also believed to be operating organically through him, eventually even in his literary, poetic and literary sensibilities. We'll look at this idea more closely on pages 23 ff.

So, in 1902 Klee moved back to his family's home in Bern

\textsuperscript{51} These dualities were the same as those of the German Romantics, c. 1800: cf. Walzel, pp. 11, 22ff., 38, 41, 53, 90, 102.

\textsuperscript{52} Walzel, pp. 24, 101.

\textsuperscript{53} This had been F. Schlegel's desire, a synthesis he thought would be ultimately effected in Christianity. -Walzel, pp.96-98.

\textsuperscript{54} Walzel, pp. 70, 20, 53-4, 58-9, 61, 70.

\textsuperscript{55} Tower, p. 107, quoting Hebbel, \textit{Theoretische Schriften}, p.666.

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Diaries}, no. 1104, p. 387 (1918).
and attacked his ennui and self-doubt by immersing himself in a self-administered program of studies in the humanities. He wanted to

broaden out until the horizon of thought once again becomes organized, and complexities, automatically falling into order, become simple again.\(^{57}\)

By this he meant that the same laws, principles, ratios he thought must inform the classicist architecture he loved, the music of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven he had grown up hearing and playing, and the orderly workings of natural processes and great art should become evident in botany, zoology, mathematics and optics, in the arts of theater, prose and poetry. He need only learn enough about art and nature to discover those laws. He thought if he internalized enough forms of art and nature then the right new forms would emerge through his own artistic imagination. He resumed the study of anatomy from life and from cadavers. In 1903 he resumed playing in the Bern orchestra. He continued to attend opera and theater, to read the classics in Greek and to read in botany, zoology, philosophy, literature, especially poetry, mathematics, and optics.

Organicism and "biological thinking"

By incorporating the Romantic idea of a transcendent origin of both art and nature, Klee could rest with the importance he'd assigned himself as artist. He could have hope of producing art as significant as any of the past. This idea uniquely enabled him to take seriously not only his own and other contemporaneous artists' forms and ideas, but also primitive\(^ {58}\) art, children's, folk, African, Oceanic art, and, uniquely, even the art of the insane. It seemed almost anyone spontaneously generating forms could be seen by Klee as someone in touch with the cosmic source

\(^{57}\) Ibid, no. 411/412, p. 119 (June 3, 1902).

\(^{58}\) See Introduction, p. 5, note 1, above.
of all form. One might speculate that he couldn't bring himself to discount any art per se, having arbitrarily elevated his own, when still a student, to a central place in world art!

Klee was also very interested in the fantastic advances made in biology and the theories of Darwin at the end of the century, and the popular "biological thinking" widespread from the late nineteenth through mid-twentieth century. Meurer and Haeckel, to cite only two, represent a great body of literature exploring organic form from an aesthetic point of view. Harmonic systems of proportion relating architecture, nature, and music were written and discussed, the more recent thinkers following in Goethe's and Herder's tracks. Goethe had believed that the Beautiful, therefore art, is

a manifestation of secret natural laws that otherwise would have remained hidden forever. This is why every one who wishes to unveil the secret of nature feels an irresistible longing for art, her worthiest interpreter. Like the creations of nature, works of art are produced by men according to true natural laws. In the works there is then the most perfect accord, 'there is necessity, there is God.' Beauty in nature consists of the order and the laws of nature.

(My emphasis.) In 1903 Klee wrote of his love of Hebbel, to whose diaries he would return throughout his life for ideas and inspiration.

Hebbel is altogether my writer, whom I do not only respect as I do a Goethe or a Shakespeare, but genuine-

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ly love, the man above all,"\(^{61}\)

Hebbel provided extensive commentary on the whole German Romantic tradition. His complicated, sometimes contradictory world view echoes Hegel and German Idealism as well as the thought of Romantics Schelling, Solger, and Schopenhauer. Goethe's writings had changed Klee's life, when he took them with him to Italy and looked at Rome's architecture through Goethe's eyes--as a school for artists, as a perfection of forms which seem as inevitable and organically necessary as do forms of nature. Now Hebbel instructed him, and continued to do so at various stages in his life, as he was able to assimilate or find expression for the ideas. Firstly, Hebbel echoed Goethe, as Klee wrote in 1903:

> Reading Hebbel, *Theoretische Schriften*... Praise of architecture as a school for the plastic arts. The concept of organism. "Nature" as school; it is a delicately meshed organism. Organisms fitted into organisms, so that the part constantly becomes the mother of new parts. Such an insight on the smallest scale is already an example.\(^{62}\)

There was much of Goethe's love of nature in the expressive paintings of the Naturlyrismus artists. The Jugendstil illustrations featured in the satirical journals were very much influenced by romantic organicism or nineteenth century "biological thinking," the aesthetic use of organic forms. Like Art Nouveau, this style

...aimed at organic structure... . Here architectural limbs and other structural parts were made to vary in thickness and profile according to the stresses they were expected to take up; that is, designed in analogy with the swelling of bones and stalks at the joints and other critical points.\(^{63}\)

(emphases mine.) This popular graphic style gave Klee his first


\(^{62}\) Ibid, p.9.

\(^{63}\) Ringbom, p. 116.
concrete example of the use of visual analogy, the abstract
notion discussed in biological thinking and central to Klee's
contribution to twentieth century Modernism.

Klee's early work: from late Biedermeier Switzerland to modern
twentieth century Germany.

In this section we'll see how Romantic irony and the Goethe-
an idea of a transcendent origin of both nature and art were the
central drive in Klee's first attempts to struggle with art forms
in his day in order to find his own voice.

Greenberg thinks it was Klee's later contact with the work
of Cezanne, Van Gogh, the Fauves and Cubists which
delivered him from that awe of Renaissance and classic
art which had prevented so many German artists from
following their native bents and had constrained them
to waste themselves in trying to emulate the Mediterra-
nean.\textsuperscript{64}

But I believe it was his assimilation of German Romantic prin­
ciples, irony and organicism foremost, which made him so much more
than an epigone. He embarked on this course while still living in
Bern with his parents, long before he knew anything of the avant­
garde. I believe it was partly as a result of Klee's isolation
from the avant-garde that he chose an art of irony, since he knew
little or nothing of the many other artists initiating assaults
on the aesthetics and forms of the past. It was this quality of
thorough-going irony, the result of having made himself the
center of a small world (at a time when the great artistic world
appeared to him to be mostly in the past) which set his eclectic
art apart from every one else's. (More of this in chapter six.)
If he had grown up in Paris or Berlin, he might have early become
an earnest force in one of the schools of the early twentieth
century. Instead, as Greenberg wrote in a June 1941 review of a
Klee retrospective for \textit{Partisan Review},

\\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, p. 67.
"Klee began with one very important personal asset...he had been born and brought up in German Switzerland in the presence of a provincial--almost folk--art with its own local and particular traits, which had something relatively new to contribute to the main stream of Western painting...something at any rate that had not re-entered it since the sixteenth century."\(^{65}\)

Addressing paradox, for a Romantic, required dialectic,\(^{66}\) and an ironical pictorial dialectic\(^{67}\) was to dominate Klee's art. The "Inventions" were a start at a dialectic preserved in the static image: first the object (the nude, objective, and of "antiquity"); then the artistic response to it in qualified figuration ("subjective" distortion of the figure); finally both are taken up into a new, torqued (satiric, ironic) figuration which preserves both but negates the straightforward acceptance of either element on its own: a unifying Aufhebung in one ego's comic sendup. It was fitting that after his rigorous training in classical representational techniques, Klee's first professional works would be satirical distortions of such classical nudes. Rather than allegorize mythical or religious subjects, his figures, with titles like "Menacing Head," suggest such themes--in this case, Salomé or Medusa--but are disquietingly non-specific, non-mythic; they are naturalistically rendered in stark isolation. Instead of either naturalistic treatment, à la Stuck, or Japan-flat stylization, like that of Beardsley, he took a cue from Rodin's "caricatures." This approach presented a third way


\(^{66}\) Walzel, pp. 22-4.

to make a turn from naturalism: the oblique appropriation of classicist figuration in caricature. The "Inventions" assimilated stylistic and iconographic sources from antiquity to nineteenth century Symbolism and the Jugendstil. Klee stylized and distorted the subtly toned naturalistic modeling of the nudes. The dark contours, symmetrical poses and composition [see "Two men meeting, each supposing the other to be of higher rank" (1903/5), appendix 1, p.115] echo Hodler's style, and Klee was glad to acknowledge the source. The choice of etching forced him to a meticulous focus on detail in the manner of the old masters. It was a time-honored technique in the fine arts, the medium of Dürer and Rembrandt, here put to scurrilous use—another irony.

Klee soon saw, in the writings of sculptor Hildebrand, a possibility of achieving more than satirical illustrative effects. In 1902 he read a new study of Hildebrand, in which the sculptor said that "the distinctive property of relief lies in its presentation of corporeal bodies as...a flat image." "Inventions" like "Two Men Meeting" and "Virgin in a Tree" (1903) (appendix 1, p.116), make use of this idea of modelled sculptural form pressed flat into the picture plane.

I have discovered a very small, undisputed, personal possession, a particular sort of three dimensional representation on the flat surface. This sort of unresolved yet aesthetically satisfactory tension between two modes of figuration pleased Klee. In fact he was interested in Hildebrand's ideas of form and of reconciling

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69 Marcel Franciscono, Paul Klee, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1991, p. 44.
70 His mature work was to present mostly flat planes of colored forms parallel or oblique to the painting's surface, floating in shallow virtual space.
71 Diaries, no. 425, p. 123 (June 2 1922).
72 Comini, p. 106.
opposites, which recalled Hegel and the Romantics' Universalpo-
esie.73 Here was the hope of allowing the whole world, in all
its contradictions, entrance to the imagination—if only the
imagination could be equipped for it! It would require a more
powerful formal way to make opposites into coexisting complements
within a picture space.

Klee began to think beyond isolated figures on white ground,
more in terms of a nesting of symbols to create a complex symbol,
the finished work. He wrote to his fiancée in September 1903:

I read in Hebbel's TS. His critical writings are well-
formed examples of what has for some time been my
conviction, namely the significance of the organic in
art. . . The structure of his sentences is exemplary and
well thought-through. Likewise the larger form in
periods, sections, and finally the whole of a piece of
his prose.74

Klee began to seek forms that would allow his work such harmoni-
ous pictorial integrity. He found some help in Goya's atmospheric
grounds and in reviewing the works of Leonardo and Rembrandt.
"Portrait of my Father" (1906) (appendix 1, p. 115 verso), "Child
in a Folding Chair" (1903) and "View of a Bedroom" (1905), show
an integration of all pictorial elements through the use of
values. He did not see the works of Goya, Blake or Beardsley
until a couple of years after he'd returned to Berne, in a 1904
visit to Munich, when the chiaroscuro and violent effects of the
one and the flowing linearity of the latter two had a great
effect on him. One need only compare "Woman and Beast" (1904)
(appendix 1, p. 116 verso) with its deep black background, dark
implications and graceful linearity, to "Virgin in a Tree"
(1903). "Two Men" is a transitional piece, with a somewhat
unifying background in a mid-range of values. Seeing Goya's
pictures had perhaps legitimated some of the moral excesses as
well as the stylistic freedom of the Decadents for Klee, since in

73 Walzel, pp. 22-3, 53.
74 Tower, p. 294, note 54, citing from Paul Klee, Briefe an
the later etching he took subject matter rather further into the forbidden.

He saw Cezannes and the flat, color-saturated and arabesqued work of Matisse in 1909. Cezanne's own use of flat planes of color within the painted surface validated his own practice of flattening of forms into shallow planes parallel to the picture surface. In about 1910 a bolder structure appears in his pictures. Tones are brushed in broad planar washes, suggesting spatial depth and connecting pictorial elements. Franciscono attributes the new unified look to Klee's scrutiny of Cezanne, who painted his subjects as if they were enmeshed in the paint itself.

Summary

Klee had chosen a way to resolve his epigonic fear--the balancing act of romantic irony by which he integrated classic figuration with modern expressionism, via satire. He conceived of a romantic cosmic origin, at home in the context of the late nineteenth century aesthetic of expression, by which he could justify going ahead with art in an "epigonic" age. He had achieved the pictorial integrity he had sought, one which reflected the unity of a natural organism. But being of a romantic musical and poetic cast, he could not rest with the traditional resolution of a static visual form. This brings us to chapter three, in which we will consider Klee's integration of time into his pictures.

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75 Compare "Scarcey a Nude" (1908) with "Ornament" (1907).
76 Franciscono, p. 111.
77 Faust had said "Insofar as I am static, I am enslaved." - cited in Walzel, p. 24.
CHAPTER THREE:

Klee avoids unnecessary dilemma of finished form vs. process

We will see in this chapter how Klee's approach emphasized both process and finished, crafted product in equal measure, by including traces of the process in the finished work, by building rhythmic ordering elements into it, and by salting in the figurative or narrative elements with an eye to directing the viewer's attention sequentially. Such a synthesis is important for later viewers and artists, since this kind of work could not be placed in the dichotomized art critical categories which dominated the art world from about 1940 on, beginning explicitly with Abstract Expressionism. In addition, temporality was a major component in his master work, which he early conceived as the sum of many small finished works over time. (See ch.6, p.92, below)

Process in the product

The idea of the forms of art parallel to the forms of nature goes back at least to Cezanne, to Hodler,78 to Solger and Goethe,79 and as we've seen, was being worked out in the Jugendstil. But Klee thought of his very process of making as an analog of nature's. Franciscono notes the first recorded emergence of this key element in Klee's working method throughout his mature career: seeing his own artistic processes as a metaphor, the

79 Beardsley, p. 234.
process of poiesis as mirroring nature's own.\footnote{Franciscono, p. 113.}

...A hope tempted me the other day as I drew with the needle on a blackened pane of glass. ...the instrument is no longer the black line, but the white one. The background is not light, but night. Energy illuminates: just as it does in nature. This is probably a transition from the graphic to the pictorial stage....

So now the motto is, "Let there be light." Thus I glide slowly over into the new world of tonalities.\footnote{Diaries, no. 632, p. 175 (April 1905).}

Franciscono notes:

It is the very process, Klee insists in a letter of May 1905, used by nature herself. "So the fable that God stepped up to the darkness with his famous "Let there be light" makes good sense. Chaos didn't bother God any more than a surface to be worked on bothers an artist.... ...it is easier and 'more natural' for the graphic artist, following His example, to work with light on a dark surface."\footnote{Franciscono, p. 113, citing a letter to Lily from Paul on p. 502 of Klee, Paul, Briefe an die Familie 1893-1940, ed. Felix Klee, 2 vols. Cologne, 1979.}

(My emphasis.)

Klee finally saw the works of Monet, Manet and Renoir on his first trip to Paris in 1905. He noted the shared subjectivism of the painterly Impressionists and the graphic Symbolists, although Impressionists emphasized retinal impressions, and the Symbolists, emotional ones:

The subject in itself is certainly dead. What counts are the impressions before the subject. The growing vogue of erotic subjects is not exclusively French, but rather a preference for subjects which are especially likely to provoke impressions.

As a result, the outer form becomes extremely variable and moves along the entire scale of temperaments...

The technical means of representation vary accordingly. The school of the old masters has certainly seen
He admired the Impressionists' fragmentary and incomplete look, being finished whenever the artist's fresh inspiration before nature ran out. He learned from them the practice of leaving in view the physical evidence of the painting process. And seeing that "the outer form becomes extremely variable," Klee, like other artists in France and Germany, took greater and greater risks with form in the first decade of the new century. Franciscono rightly finds affinities to Lautrec's "undulating contours,...pale flesh tone against dark ground, and...expressionism" in "Portrait of a Pregnant Woman (Lily)" of 1907 (appendix 2, p. 135). Van Gogh and Ensor's work, which Klee saw in 1907-08, was a revelation. These were painters whose form-making gestures, as never before, remained visible in the finished works.

Klee continued to do many studies from nature 1908-11, but with the intent of discovering form-generating processes humanly analogous to inner ordering principles of nature, rather than working from the outward forms of nature. He knew when a work was finished because for him, as for Goethe,

...a perfect work of art appear[s] like [sic] a work of nature to me also... ...it is above natural, yet not unnatural. A perfect work is a work of the human soul, and in this sense, also, a work of nature.

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83 Diaries, no. 670, p. 184 (July 1906).
84 Klee discovered Lautrec's work in 1906.
85 Franciscono, p. 102.
86 Klee wrote "The realization that there exists a line that benefits from Impressionism and at the same time conquers it has a truly electrifying effect on me. 'Progress possible in the line!'"-Diaries, no. 899, p. 260 (Spring 1909).
To this end Klee imposed ordering disciplines on his own imagination, for example, choosing subject matter which included architectonic forms; but this was still imitatio. He tried various procedural experiments, such as this one recorded in his diary of summer 1908:

Genesis of a work: 1. Draw strictly from nature, possibly with a field glass. 2. Turn no. 1 upside down, emphasize the main lines according to your feeling. 3. Return the sheet to its first position and bring 1=nature and 2=picture into harmony.

This exercise, like an expressionistic approach, treated the artist's associative and intuitive faculties as agents of a preeminent qualifying order on the traces left by "strictly" drawing nature, the resulting form being a synthesis of the two. He tried starting with optical effects from nature: around 1908 he learned to blur an image by looking through a lens. The resultant distortions were to "cast a bridge from the inside to the outside," to link expressive form with actual natural forms.

Exploring the properties of a material or medium also served to grow form organically related to its physical source. Klee developed other procedures for linking up the life of his imagination with some of the orderings of nature, without recourse to imitatio as ordering principle. These procedures varied from

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88 Pierre Boulez notes that "...la spontanéité ne peut tout produire car elle fait lourdement fond sur la mémoire...il est parfois nécessaire, et utile...de jouer avec quelques éléments sans aucun contexte, de faire quelques esquisses sans but précis, et de voir comment une solution en sortira....l'on est forcé d'inventer des solutions nouvelles et imprévues. Il s'agit donc d'une interaction entre imagination et rigueur, et il en résultera une impulsion pleine de force vers la réalité d'une œuvre."—Pierre Boulez, Le Pâvee Fertile, Paris, Editions Gallimard, 1989, pp.123-5.

89 Diaries, no. 822, p. 226 (June 1908).

90 Klee read studies on optics by E. Mach and Helmholtz in 1908.

91 Diaries, no. 831, p. 228 (July 1908).
picture to picture, but in each case he submitted himself to a chosen discipline.

**Transition to works from imagination, and isomorphic form.**

Klee began his etchings illustrating *Candide* (appendix 1, p.117) in 1911, finished in 1912. They mark a transition from his Impressionist-influenced working from nature to the first studio works which successfully integrated up to several figures at a time. What he admired in *Candide* besides the rationalist's humorous mocking was the "exquisitely spare and exact expression of the Frenchman's style." He began to aspire to this same economy. His long, scratchy, transparent figures have none of the grotesque physiognomic detail he'd indulged in his "Inventions," yet he'd lost none of their satirical spirit. These pictures combined all the messiness of human interactions with the bare minimum of telling lineaments in their forms and gestures, reducing them to all but "linear rhythms," and thus to a kind of pictorial music. For his very spare but richly evocative effect, no illusionistic modelling of volumes nor tonal suggestions of space were necessary.

In a symbolic world, everything is taken to mean, unlike the work world, in which there is much we necessarily ignore. And in Klee's poetic symbol world, beauty is a matter of maximum economy and simplicity of those means. R. Arnheim calls such simple form isomorphic;

> Aesthetic beauty is the isomorphic correspondence between what is said and how it is said.\(^{94}\)

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92 Ibid, no. 865, p. 240 (Summer 1909).

93 Franciscono, p. 134.

For Klee, this economic correspondence of form to content makes the symbol world analogous to nature, where every part of an organism appears to be necessary and useful, fitting into the larger whole. Klee avoided distracting viewers with unnecessary elements, and so gave the non-visual meanings of his figures (named by the text) greater, undiluted impact. For the first time he used abstract forms—lines and scribbles—as more than expressive means: now they were allusive, evocative of real world entities and events, as visual analogs of holistic experience. In short, his forms became symbols within the symbol world of a painting. So he began to fulfil Hebbel's aesthetic of "organisms fitted into organisms" (ch.2, pp.24-25, above) in space, even as they took on temporal "rhythms".

In each of the developments above, Klee was concentrating on the artistic process of making. And in each case, he wanted a process the traces of which would be physically preserved in the finished form. Klee derived from Hebbel, Cezanne, and the Jugendstil the idea of visual analogs to nature's finished forms. The structuring process—artistic poeisis as analog of natural growth—I believe he developed from the idea of visual analogs to nature in time (growth), evolving in a process most akin to musical time, which Klee had in his bones. Hebbel had confirmed the desirability of process visible in product for Klee, in saying that art represents life both in its being and its becoming:

Only in this way does art become what it should be, that is life within life; for that which is accomplished and completed (das Zuständlich-Geschlossene) suppresses the creative breath in the work of art without which it is ineffecual, while that which embryonically convulses (das Embryonisch-Aufzuckende) is devoid of form.95

95 Tower, p. 106, quoting Hebbel, Theoretische Schriften, p.545.

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Klee echoed, in 1914:

Genesis as formal movement is the essential thing in a work.96

From the genuinely living thing to the objective thing.97

The creation lives as genesis beneath the visible surface of the work.98

It was largely owing to his acquaintance and work with W. Kandinsky that Klee could write in 1920 that "Space is a temporal concept,"99 having also engaged by that time his musical and poetical self in the rendering of temporal process in finished visual objects. Meeting Kandinsky and the Blaue Reiter group in 1911 was a signal event in Klee's career. Kandinsky gave him his first experience of "dematerialized" (abstract) forms.100 The expressionism of the Blaue Reiter was restrained by a desire for harmonic color, rhythmic form, and decorative line, and in this it was influenced by Matisse, the Jugendstil and Naturlyrismus. Although the school manifested more mystic speculation than intellectual rigor, there was much in common with Klee's thought, but also important differences. Among them were Klee's coolness towards not only the fervent spiritualism but the particular Fauvist forms of the Blaue Reiter, as towards Cubism and Suprema-

96 Diaries, no. 943, p. 310 (Spring 1914, Tunis).
97 Ibid, no. 944, p. 312 (Spring 1914, Tunis).
98 Ibid, no. 932D, p. 308 (April 1914).
100 Kandinsky and several friends out of his artists group, the Neue Kunstlervereinigung had split off to form the Blaue Reiter, which included Jawlewsky, Munter, Marc, Macke, and in 1912, Klee.

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tism; as he was in fact towards styles in general, defined as programmatic vocabularies of forms. Klee saw abstraction, like classical form in his "Inventions," like Romantic themes and motifs, and like the scribblings of Candide, as something to play with in sidling towards holistically rendered reality, not as an end in itself.

Abstraction from this world more as a game, less as a failure of the earthly. Somewhere in between. The man in love no longer drinks and eats.  

Rather than commit himself to one of the evanescent movements of the new world of art he was discovering, Klee sought a synthesis of these various modes and inventions. His detachment, and the willingness to separate content from the forms which might carry it, was remarkable at a time when allegiance to one theory or school was as passionate a commitment as the taking of vows in a religious order; and form was increasingly being thought of as part of, sometimes all of, the subject matter. Rather, Klee began to interpret and to order for himself the best of the avant-garde's inventions, with partly unconscious processes analogous, he thought, to those of nature. So he would master the new world for himself. He was in fact redefining the concept of style. It was no longer a matter of a certain type or range of forms by which an artist or group might be known; for him, style referred to one's process of making or poiesis, informed and directed by the totality of one's being. Style was for Klee a verb: "I am my style." He might more accurately have said "I am styling." This too derived ultimately from the Romantics:

The soul wishes to preserve its freedom. Infinite determinability, which...in Schiller's estimation is an advantage, is most truly safeguarded to him who is most capable of protean mobility...[which is actually] based upon the consciousness of being at all times able to rise above itself. Herein lies also the root of roman-

\[101\] **Diaries**, no. 922, p. 278 (1913).
tic irony.¹⁰²

Viewing in time: visual analogs of music.

Klee's intense musical sensibility had no professional outlet from 1898, when he started art school, until 1914, when he found his own way to make his musicality visual and, in the process, provide a framework for an art in which seemingly antithetical abstract and figurative, analytical and expressionist elements are both necessary and complementary. It started in 1912 when Klee encountered R. Delaunay.¹⁰³ It was Delaunay's theories that most interested Klee, as set forth in "Sur La Lumière," which Klee translated for Der Sturm in 1913. Klee saw for the first time in Delaunay's work not stylized or Expressionist nature, nor Cubist-fragmented natural forms, but pictures comprised solely of color relationships, in vaguely figurative forms suggesting, in his most famous series, windows. It seemed to Klee that here was the tantalizing prospect of representing our experience of space, movement and time, using color progressions instead of visual descriptions of objects, much as a musician uses non-descriptive notes and chords. It wasn't until Klee's trip to Tunis in 1914, with A. Macke and L. Moillet, that he found a subject matter which occasioned his first attempt at a

¹⁰² Walzel, p. 24.

¹⁰³ Delaunay's Orphism was an autonomous painting close in spirit and substance to that of the Blaue Reiter, which is sometimes seen as an offshoot of it. It featured forms supposedly deriving from man's "orphic," subconscious connection with the rest of nature, a doctrine close in spirit to Klee's romantic thought. It had assimilated Cubist form construction, Seurat's color construction, along with Gauguin's and the Nabis' idea of a picture surface based on mathematical proportions, and the Jugendstil-Romantic idea of art as an expression of nature. By means of these disciplines, the artist was to translate the world into a visual poem.

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pictorially structuring use of color: the architecture and landscape of Kairoun and environs, bathed in brilliant light. Macke had already adopted the grid composition of Delaunay's 1912 "Fenêtres". Working next to him, Klee was emboldened to try a cubist grid-structuring of natural landscape, although his space was less defined, "softer" than Macke's. It was a coordinate pattern of checker-lines, which are simultaneously the edges of open passage planes, [by which] a completely non-perspectival pictorial space is created. The scheme has graphic consistency on the picture surface, yet is capable of visually precise, and infinitely variable, measurement into depth. Because of their peculiar, and constant, hinging or devolution from the frontmost (picture) plane, the passage planes have endless ambiguity.

It was a short step from his cubistic grids of Tunisian landscapes to grids of more vivid, pure color (Grohmann's "magic squares:" see appendix 2, p.139) which would create "independent color themes, analogous to the simultaneity of independent themes in musical polyphony."[Klee] trouvait dans l'échiquier un thème très dense, très en rapport avec l'univers musical, celui de la division...à l'horizontal: du temps,...et à la verticale: l'espace. Le temps est horizontal, il va toujours de la gauche vers la droite. L'espace ce sont les accords, les lignes mélodique, les intervalles qui peuvent être ramenés à des divisions qui, visuellement, se distribuent à la verticale.

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105 See "On a Motif from Hamamet" (1914), appendix 1, p.116 verso, and appendix 2, p. 134 verso.
108 Boulez, p. 77.

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Klee could modify these two dimensions in any number of ways. For example, the horizontal progression may be a different color in each square, related systematically by tones or their positions on the color wheel, or there may be a repeating sequence of colors, varying slightly each repetition.

"Si bien que non seulement a été défini un espace strié, divisé en unités repérables, mais que cet espace a été modulé suivant une certaine directivité,...qui fait mesurer à la fois sa grandeur et la façon dont il évolue."

(My emphasis) Once again, Klee preserved process in the form. He had discovered that in addition to the space-making properties of relations between colored planar units, their distribution gave the picture a temporal quality by directing viewers' attention in a certain sequence and at varying rates.

Gotthold Lessing had said—and Kandinsky agreed—that time dictates roles: a painting, being a static object, is perceived with one glance, whereas poetry is read in time, and so has a dynamic quality. Klee disagreed. He felt modern painting had the advantage over music in having past and future simultaneously present on the two dimensional surface, if the painter desired, whereas the whole of a musical piece can only be savored at its end. He saw the Futurists' challenge to Lessing's idea in their trying to depict motion in a painting, but he saw a better answer starting from the recognition that looking at a picture takes time, as does its creation. Kandinsky wanted his paintings to actually "sound" as music sounds—synaesthetically, spiritually and abstractly—while being contemplated. Klee looked to music in a more intellectual way, interested in its compositional structure, and how that might be translated into a visual analog

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109 Ibid, p. 79.


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which would preserve the temporality of music, its necessary being-perceived-over-time, and bring that into the experience of viewing the painting, because in so doing the viewer would see the genesis or process of the work live again within the finished, static structure of the work: another paradox. Purely abstract works from this period like "Abstract-Colored Circles with Colored Bands" (1914), or "Movement of Gothic Halls" of 1915 (both app. 2, p. 135 v.) show some of his first attempts at color harmonies which create a sense of movement for the viewer. The same is true of "Mirage at Sea" (1918), which incorporates linear themes also, some of them describing musical signs along the way—a fermata, a bass cleff, notes. "Camel in a Rhythmic Landscape" (1920), "Rose Garden" (1920) (both app. 2, p. 136 v.), and "Destroyed Village" (1920), use colored figurative elements to create the visual equivalent of musical intervals, with trees looking like notes on cleff lines and houses punctuating a dark landscape rhythmically, like drumbeats. Renée Hubert offers a telling commentary on Klee's "Architecture" of 1923 (app. 1, p. 118), one of the pure color paintings,¹¹¹ which illustrates Klee's very definite and, I think, more successful appropriation of Delaunay's vague linking of color, light, representation and movement in time. Klee was as ever creating visual analogs of extra-visual realities: here, the musical order-in-time (process) he believed related to the proportions-in-space of classical architecture. So he makes the static image "read" like music. This passage also notes Klee's ability to make purely abstract forms "read" allusively according to a title's suggestion.

We confront a composition of blocks that do not reveal a recognizable structure, but suggest musical rhythms... . The viewer is struck by the economy of means, simply blue and yellow rectangles, avoiding exact repetition, creating rhythms by what appear to be

controlled irregularities... As the rectangles are roughly painted on a dark blue surface, gaps emerge... combined with the unevenness of the colored surface, suggest the possibility of movement and change.\textsuperscript{12} As the rectangles' projected and potential motion suggests breathing or growth, the exclusively formal qualities of the painting are transcended, and organic dimensions emerge... In addition to the fluctuating colors and the vibrating lines... a few of the rectangles become cubes... protrusions and recessions appear... The triangles in the upper region of the painting assert an upward thrust... . ...Klee conveys the notion of architecture not by representation of a building, but as an ongoing process, blueprinted, if not built, by the viewer as well as by the artist...\textsuperscript{13}

(My emphases.) Klee's processes enable the visible forms in which persons and things can be visually represented to be effectual and expressive when read in time, like a potentiated visual music or poetry; spatially emotive, colorfully harmonic, linearly expressive, and figuratively allusive, with associations flickering like colorful lights and darks.

Works after 1916\textsuperscript{14} often combine both abstract and figurative forms. They are comprised of color harmonies with strong colored linear elements also working to create visual rhythms which move the viewer's eye at varying tempos through the picture space, glissando here, full stop there. (Some of these have musical titles.) In these we see painted line variously directive, evocative and allusive; suggesting forms like birds or

\textsuperscript{12} Compare the squares, rectangles and other geometric figures of Kandinsky drawn with drafting tools for precision and an impersonal quality.


\textsuperscript{14} Those catalogued by Grohmann as "Cubism and Kairoun," "Cosmic Imagery," "Formal Experiments" and "Oil Paintings." See Appendix one, below. (From Grohmann, PK, pp. 388-90; see below, app. 2, pp. 135 v.-136 v.)
houses, outlining folk symbols like birds, stars, moons; suggesting both foliage and sound waves or heat waves in "Lech River Landscape" (1917), representing creatures in a generic, cartoon-like way, as in "Bavarian Don Giovanni" (1919)(app.1, p.118 v.) who sways atop an unsupported ladder singing of his conquests, in which lines also actually form the names of his victims, hovering in colorful squares around Don Juan. In all of these, line performs its traditional and Fauvist function of containing areas of color. It was in seeking a way to be able to incorporate his often literary, satirical and lyrical line into what he'd learned of color and painting that led him to begin, in compositions like "Scene from a Hoffman-Like Tale" (1921)(app.1, p.119), to divorce the functions of line and color for the first time, a development very important for him and for late modern art. Instead of having colors fall within lines used as boundaries, line came to play its own distinctive part, just as does melody as against chords, or as a lightweight libretto does in relation to the music of the opera. By separating the two Klee, who wanted to secure his place in the avant garde, was able to fully unleash his irreverent wit in a way he hadn't dared since "Inventions," because "serious" abstract color painting counterbalanced its sometimes spindly, ragged linear expression.  

115 See for example "Twittering Machine" (1922)(app.1, p.119 v.) or "The Ex-Kaiser" (1921)(app.2, p.137 v.)

Klee's use of visual analogs for polyphony in his art and

115 "By 1919 he was beginning to regard the same sort of color composition as a possible setting for line drawings as well as for words, hence as a possible means to elevate and save his linear poetry, even as Mozart's music elevated and saved the rather dubious poetry of Da Ponte's libretti...Not one of Klee's narrow-line drawings can in itself be regarded as a major work of art, and the highly self-critical Klee was well aware of this fact. But some of Klee's 'operatic' pictures--combinations of narrow-line drawing and absolute color composition--rank not far below his finest works." -Kagan, p. 97.
Bauhaus theory took its cue from the late-eighteenth century musical practice of writing fully independent, not imitative, separate voices with independent thematic content, as set forth theoretically in J.J. Fux's *Gradus ad Parnassum* (1725)\textsuperscript{116} and perfected, Klee thought, by Mozart. He came to define polyphony as a range of certain types of pictorial organization in depth, and counterpoint as linear and formal organization on the picture surface.\textsuperscript{117}

"Literary" painting.

Kandinsky spoke of colored forms as analogs to music, something very intriguing to Klee. But unlike Kandinsky and Malevich, Klee never came to believe that figuration was a distraction to the visual music of forms. From the twenties, with Kandinsky, Suprematism, de Stijl and Constructivism gaining the ascendency in the European avant-garde, "literary" painting increasingly came to be frowned upon—that is, representational as opposed to abstract or "musical" painting. But Klee insisted on preserving the semantic moment in pictures. His titles cue the viewer as to what to look for, and the eye is led by figurative associations as well as rhythms and lines. He was however aware of the temptation, given his background, of falling back on romantic fantasy.\textsuperscript{118} He dealt with it by poking fun at the tendency even as it surfaced in his works. Kagan is right in noting a self-conscious "hierarchy of seriousness" in Klee parallel to that of Mozart. His works range from lightweight lyrical or "romantic" themes which are rendered comically, to more painterly

\textsuperscript{116} Ibid, p. 41ff.

\textsuperscript{117} In classical music theory any contrapuntal writing is polyphonic, although "'counterpoint'...often suggests a special emphasis on structural principles, and a strictly imitative style." -Ibid, pp. 52-58.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid, p. 95.

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treatments of such images\textsuperscript{119} and attempts to render the forma­tive processes in nature, an old romantic subject revised in a completely twentieth century way\textsuperscript{120} Kagan and Plant show Klee's use of stage, opera, and spectacle motifs in pictorial absurd fantasy. It seems to me in most cases he did so to point up the silly excesses of traditional libretti, and sometimes of the performers themselves.\textsuperscript{121} Look for example at "Hoffman-like Tale" (app.1, p.119). In this pictorial operetta, a yards-long spring uncoils from the nose of an annoyed person and attaches to the middle of a tall upright structure full of what look like steps and a swinging trapeze, a crazily pendulous clock, and a seated figure perched swaying on top of a collapsing ladder; all balanced precariously via a pneumatic tube on a single wheel. Heavy plant fronds or water jets holding a traditionally rendered heart with antennae sprouting from the top proceed out of a forcefully downward tending arrow, threatening to crush the singer on whose nose it is balanced like some of Cupid's heavier artillery misfiring. At the top of the "set" is, yes, a little star and a crescent moon; but the moon gives no light, a rooster crows over it, and star and moon have to be protected by a rickety umbrella. In fact his "staged" pictures look remarkably like the puppet theater and puppets he made for his son when Felix was small.

It's easy to see why Klee's unpredictable and barbed wit appealed to early Dadaists.

\textsuperscript{119} cf. "Landscape with Yellow Birds" (1923); "Flowers of Sorrow" (1917); "With the Eagle" (1918); "Ad Marginem" 1930

\textsuperscript{120} Cf. "Snails," 1926; "Cross and Spiral Blossoms," 1925; and "King of the Snails," 1933, the latter app.1, p.120, below. And see Robert Rosenblum, Modern Painting and the Northern Romantic Tradition: Friedrich to Rothko, London, Thames and Hudson, 1975.

\textsuperscript{121} E.g. see "Contact between 2 musicians" (1922); "Ventriloquist" (1923); "Scene from the comic operatic fantasy 'The Seafarer'" (1923).
Summary

The importing of genuinely old romantic subject matter into twentieth century avant garde art is no mean feat. Klee accomplished this by the use of a new idiom which he created out of elements of the German Romantic aesthetic. From their satiric spirit and never-ending dialectic of irony, of which he made his own synthesizing humor, he achieved a "protean mobility" of styles in a twentieth century key, and a concentration on both process and dynamic as well as poetic content. Klee's approach provides a way to avoid the false dilemma that arose later in the nineteen forties and persisted almost to the present, between an emphasis on process and an emphasis on finished work. He kept the traces of the work's growth in the final form, arranged its elements for sequential viewing, ordered it in a narrative way, and set forms and lines working contrapuntally to each other. In so doing, he also helped to redeem drawing from its second class status as only preparatory for painting.

The separation of line and color also set Klee apart. Whereas in Matisse's and Expressionist art, Cubism and Constructivism, color and line are highly interdependent, Klee on the whole came to emphasize the autonomy of each as pictorial elements, and played them against each other. Each element threw the other into high relief by contrast. In every work, in formal terms, he mocked his own illustrative tendency as he indulged it. This dynamic was a unique amalgam of romantic irony, operatic motifs and visual analogs to the polyphonic music of eighteenth century Vienna.

Klee created a "musical" painting of rhythmic, dynamic pictures which "read" sequentially. In addition, because he did not restrict his line drawings to descriptive representation, but wove allusive and iconic representation into his truly musical paintings in the form of dancing, rhythmic, directive, evocative,
expressive lines, he preserved the idea of the integral relatedness of figuration and abstraction through the latter half of the twentieth century, when artists felt pressured to take sides. We'll look at how Klee accomplished this in chapter four.
CHAPTER FOUR: The dilemma of abstract vs. figurative art.

"The urge to abstraction"

The failure to understand Klee is in part a failure in understanding abstract art... Klee's art is not either representational or non-figurative. It is conceptual... a child... symbolizes his significant concept of the thing he draws, and a great deal of Klee's work can only be understood in this way.122

As we have seen, Klee insisted on a semantic moment, on poetic content separable from form. Increasingly throughout the late twenties and thirties this would put him formally at odds with Kandinsky, Dada, Constructivism and the Bauhaus, even Surrealism, as the avant-garde moved away from "literary"--that is, representational--painting. In this chapter we will see how Klee, using Kandinsky's innovations and Cubist and Constructivist forms, effected a synthesis of figuration and avant-garde abstraction, and potentiated the powers of both.

Worringer defined "dread of space" (Raumangst), and thus fear of voluminous form and complex relations of forms in space, as an important motivation in the "urge to abstraction," which counters this anxiety with flatness.123 Klee avoided the volumetric qualities of Cubism, and used its "grid" to make crystal-


123 Significantly, Worringer cited Hildebrand, one of Klee's early influences, as a modern artist who resorted to the relief style in order to reduce the "...agonizing quality [of]... the cubic" in his sculpture. -Wilhelm Worringer, Abstraction and Empathy [1908], trans. M. Bullock, NY, World Publishing Co., 1953, p. 23.
line, immaterial forms. Thus he reversed the sensuous physicality of Cubism—but to convey a weightier, metaphysical content. Abstraction for Klee meant, as for Kandinsky, the dematerialization and reduction of form, in order to expose a larger (Kandinsky would say a spiritual) reality beyond the surface appearance of objects. He followed Kandinsky in this: in Klee's case, it meant dematerialization of the solid physical forms of Cubism and the cold geometries of Constructivism. He also followed Kandinsky in carefully crafting and constructing pictures which, seemingly paradoxically, carried romantic and expressionist content from Naturalyrismus, Jugendstil, and Symbolist thought. Kandinsky shared the belief of Symbolist circles and of the theosophists around the turn of the century in the imminent dawning of a new, anti-materialist era. The desire to express this spirituality led Kandinsky to search for ways of "dematerializing" painting, which he thought would help to elevate base man by raising his sights to the spiritual "sounds" of pure form. It was Klee's romantic belief that the spiritual realm could never be reached—except imaginatively, symbolically

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124 I do not think his pictures could be called anorganic, except for a severe geometric period in the late twenties.


126 "Visual artists such as Klee and Miro...[sought]...in the cosmic poetry of...Novalis a counterpart to their own vision of new spaces....an alternative to materialism.... If Klee said that his task was to make the invisible visible, he was enacting the visions of uncharted spaces that had so moved him in Novalis. ...the dissolution of the laws of time and space that Balzac had said the mind alone can perform was a precise project of Schoenberg's." -Dore Ashton, A Fable of Modern Art, London, Thames and Hudson, 1980, p. 100.

127 Kandinsky too was trained in these traditions, although of the German Romantics he had mostly indirect knowledge, through the Symbolists' interpretations.

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through art. So Klee's purpose was not to usher in a new spiritual age, but rather to give a larger view of reality, including intangible aspects, by means of symbolic form. Abstract forms juxtaposed with figurative forms opened many more associative passages, the abstract forms sometimes even more than figurative ones acting as roundhouses or switches where many meanings could be linked. Abstract forms also conveyed a sense of spirituality or absolute form. By their very presence in the picture the viewer was keyed to seek more than is described in the sum of the figurative forms.

It was for this purpose and for this "content" that Klee began to employ the formal means of Cubism, as if imposing another exercise on himself. But now instead of using natural processes or procedural problems to channel and order his expression, he used the artifice of a new art form. In so doing, Klee also began a unique synthesis between, on one hand, German expressionism and its romantic freight of longing for a transcendent order, and French analytic Cubism, developed out of attention to the materiality of small objects in the studio. Klee in his paradoxical way abstracted the forms of Cubism, making them wobbly and transparent, tentative and very personally drawn: and all in order to depict weighty, metaphysical themes! A glance at some of his titles is revealing: titles like "Violent Death" (1912), and "Carried Away to Dance" (1912). In terms of content, Klee is certainly closer to Kandinsky than to the French Cubists, sharing a tendency to the theme of confrontation between human figures and cosmic forces.128

Abstract forms become visual analogs of real experience.

Klee saw Cubist works for the first time in the Blaue Reiter

128 Tower, p. 53.
exhibitions of 1911-1912. Initially, in the works of 1912 Klee took from Cubism—and perhaps also from children's drawings—only a way to construct and articulate figures. He faceted his figures, articulating them in crude geometric shapes by use of intersecting lines at roughly forty-five, sixty, and ninety degree angles. Klee cut "Harlequinade" (1912) from a larger drawing, but the truncated vertical lines look like marionette strings attached to the harlequins, an effect he does nothing to minimize.

Klee was beginning a metaphoric use of abstract formal construction, in addition to that of subject matter and process, to represent the intangible realities of modern human existence: here, the fragility humans share with tiny transparent life forms like fish and microscopic life; our energy and will, captured in the economical forward-rushing movement and excited gestures; and at the same time our helplessness in the ordered, constructed cosmos of which we're a dependent part. Franciscono notes aptly

There is irony in the fact that Klee should have bent cubism to his particular ends...[to] make order itself a bittersweet symbol for the causally limited condition of things.130

From 1912 on Klee's figures, even the powerful spiritual ones, have little bodies and limbs and big heads. This configuration acts as a visual analogy for human ineffectuality coupled with overly large powers of willing, wishing, and imagining--part

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129 The construction of figures by diagonally crossing lines forming wedge shapes echo the first rectangular, then diagonal motifs children successively incorporate in their art, illustrations of which Klee saw in Munich school superintendent George Kerchensteiner's massive scholarly study of children's art, widely circulated by 1906.—Werckmeister, "Childhood," p.141. (app.1, p.126 & 126 v.)

130 Franciscono, pp. 196-7.
of the romantic experience of life as unfulfilled longing.\textsuperscript{131} It represents, as Franciscono points out, the "contrast between people's puniness and their behavior or pretensions."\textsuperscript{132} Again, Klee makes a formal device work symbolically, an abstract schema represent something very familiar. Such practice is in itself nothing new; for centuries artists had used ordering of pictorial elements, the vectors of tonal composition, various kinds of perspective, and expressive qualities of contour and color to "say" much more than did the subject matter in itself. What was new was the amount of allusion or information a very simple formal device like this was deliberately made to carry.

There is also a mocking of Cubism's supposed "analysis" of form in an ironic, faux-primitivist way. But although Klee seemed to draw in the manner of children, he applied a highly refined eye for form to the work at every stage. "Reduced to the barest essentials, these figures take on a symbolic function and become paradigms for human situations."\textsuperscript{133} They are serious, poetic, beaux arts cartoons. So Klee took Kandinsky's "reduction and "dematerialization" of form in a unique direction: not wishing to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Wilhelm Worringer, whose \textit{Abstraction and Empathy} (1908) was initially received with enthusiasm by the Blaue Reiter painters, had said abstraction was used by northern europeans to counter anxiety in a hostile natural environment--to impose anorganic order on an unruly wilderness; or it was used, as by the Egyptians, to express an oriental freedom from anxiety, who were presumed to have recognized the relativity of all things. If as I believe Klee's irony was a response to his epigonic anxiety, then his irony-mediated synthesis of abstraction and figuration could be seen as a response to both of Worringer's motives of abstraction: to mitigate the "agonizing quality of the cubic" as Worringer thought (northern european) Hildebrand had done (Worringer, p. 22), and to express Klee's eventual impassive acceptance of contradictions and tensions, which he saw as necessary complements to each other.
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Franciscono, p. 193.
  \item \textsuperscript{133} Tower, p.66.
\end{itemize}

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give up figuration, he produces paradigmatic caricatures, human diagrams in which we can read something of real life. He used Kandinsky's abstracting process to arrive at a more potent form of representation.

The increasing complexities of illusionistic modelling in Cubist form were not suited to Klee's preference for spontaneity and expressive line. And for him, as Tower said,

Cubism [was]...intellectual and rationalistic, [quoting Klee:] "a school of form philosophers, of men with speculative tendencies" who pursue the Renaissance ideal of geometrically ordered composition to its logical consequence.\textsuperscript{134}

That is, the analytic faculty applied to art produces analytic, not allusive, art. Klee wanted an order informing his pictures, but not a premeditated, cognitively directed and programmatic order of forms derived from nature. He used Analytic Cubist forms as part of his synthetist, ironic, organic ordering processes.

Klee had not found a convincing new way to create virtual space since his 1902 application of Hildebrand's relief ideas. During 1913 he progressively appropriated elements of cubistic space, to accommodate non-volumetric figures not derived from classical sources. In so doing he introduced ambiguous depths into his heretofore opaque Fauvist space. One way he did so involved extension of the geometric faceting of his figures into their spatial context: they began to be integrated into a virtual space which was at first articulated, like the figures, only by intersecting lines. He tied together his child and African -sourced figures, masks and heads with abstract networks of lines suggesting by turns diagrams, webs, cubistic space, and puppet strings. This structuring of space was the first step towards applying Cubist "passage" to create ambiguous and multi-layered spatial effects. Jordan suggests another important space-related difference between a work of 1912, "Uncanny Moment," (app.1,

\textsuperscript{134} Tower, pp. 42-43.

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p.121) and that of 1913, "Human Weakness" (app.1, p.120 v.). In the first, "the optical scale and implied stage space of the pre-modern tradition" is maintained, but in the latter, differences in the figures' scale under the sun imply undetermined distances between them indicating psychological, familial, even cosmic relationships diagrammed, as it were, in the drawing. That is, we see Klee "composing in a Cubist way,"\textsuperscript{135} letting the stylistic device carry more of the represented meaning.

Klee further articulated picture space by the end of 1913, by adding varying tones to his geometric wedges of pictorial space. Cubist "passage" created pockets of space which could be read as receding or protruding, as shallow or deep, opaque or transparent, folding at the boundaries between darker and lighter colored forms. This too keyed a viewer to a psychological moment in his perception. Klee's space accords with our experience of space seeming to vary with our circumstances and disposition; that is, what is a safe, cozy room for one seems stuffy to another; an open city plaza seems expansive and exciting to one, chaotic and scary to another. What used to be represented as uniform "objective" space is now shaped by human meanings attaching to it, a space created by man as he represents it to himself.

Kandinsky had put forth two options in dealing with organic forms, "stripping bare," which meant the reduction and simplification of forms down to the most abbreviated allusion to the object; and "hiding" or making forms indistinct within the picture. Klee's 1912 drawings are essays in "stripping bare," focused on the "inner sound"\textsuperscript{136} of forms—that is, most were abstract. His use of abstract and semi-abstract forms such as signs and simple symbols meant that Klee could return to "poetic" content and complex, metaphysical subject matter as in early

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid, pp. 86-7.

\textsuperscript{136} Tower, p.68.
works, without being accused of being "literary."

Franciscono astutely interprets "Garden of Passion" (app.1, p.122) as a sort of pre-scientific vision of creation, full of entities undifferentiated yet distinct. In "Little World" (1914) the symbiotic, undivided primal mass also includes human signs and human beings, fitted into the vegetable, animal and inanimate matter of the picture world.\(^{137}\) This creation gone wrong, the faces like sinister sharp-toothed masks, is a malevolent environment harking back to the Decadents' all-over, fragmenting linear design and morbid subject matter. These pictures evoke a primal state where spiritual beings might move about in the world.\(^{138}\)

Cubist space as Klee used it was alien enough from naturalism to prepare viewers to bring other than visual faculties to bear immediately: semantic, logical, psychical. We are to look as in reading a map or diagram and also as if looking at, say, a marble tabletop, or clouds, to pick out forms by association and allusion. Yet because of its illusion of a shallow virtual space, we are called to also look as if into a shallow box at recognizable objects within, as in Cubist paintings. Thus, Klee effects a dialectic of qualified ways of seeing normally thought to be exclusive, and we synthesize new meaning(s) as we look.

\(^{137}\) He was here inspired perhaps by Picasso and Braque's use of letters, numbers, and music hall graphics in their collages.

\(^{138}\) Klee's pictures were suffused with an agnostic spiritualism which yet exults in evidence of purposeful creation in nature. Throughout his working life Klee imparted to the humblest objects in his pictures an animation which related not to an actual pantheism or "panpsychism," but rather to his belief that creatures were formed by ordering processes analogous to the formative drive of the artist, by a creative origin working in both nature and artists. In this Klee echoed the quasi-animism of Romantic works by Goethe, Hoffman, Heine, and F.T. Vischer, in his Auch Einen.
- Franciscono, p.182.

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"The Dancer" [app. 1, p. 123] looks at first like an ugly geometric figure... these forms are really variations on the top, the pendulum-line swinging and the spiral [which] only exist in moving... as your eye explores you feel movement. They imply all the positions of the dancer, so that the picture is a little ballet in itself.... His forms are symbols which start things moving inside ourselves.... They make in us whole ways of perception, not only strong ways of seeing as Braque’s forms do.¹³⁹

(My emphasis.)

Kandinsky and Delaunay abstracted forms at first from forms observed in nature. By 1914 Klee, like Malevich, was beginning with forms generated from within, but unlike Malevich, he did not restrict himself to so-called "pure" geometric forms from a purely analytic mode of thinking, but brought forth unpredictable, irregular and ever-changing forms out of his whole experience, in a sort of automatic writing.¹⁴⁰ He then let the resulting forms suggest associations with objects or themes, modifying them and naming them accordingly, so there are just enough familiar signs, symbols and generic figures in the picture to lead us on into unfamiliar visual territory, where their new configurations produce new synthetic experiences.

Abstract Constructivists Gabo and Pevsner sounded very like Klee when they wrote in 1920

We renounce in a line, its descriptive value... We affirm the line only as a direction of the static forces and their rhythm in objects.¹⁴¹

But Klee's line was not only a visible vector of energy; it was also a form-generating force. Far from believing these "abstract"

¹³⁹ Thwaites, part i, p. 11.

¹⁴⁰ Other "automatic writers" like André Masson or Lee Krasner followed Klee's precedent in this, but without submitting to any limiting processes or order.

functions negated the line's "descriptive" value, he made them metaphors to give them an allusive and analogic value. "Fesselung" (1920) (app.1, p.123) looks abstract because of the constructivist forms, until our eye, following the counterpuntally dancing lines around, finds them forming a basic generic figure of a leaping man, the two lines now joined in one unbreakable black form like bound or praying hands with fingers straining, the "head" equally dark. Visually retracing our steps we now read the lines as temporal tracks of his busy "feet" and see the journey has been intense, interrupted in places and once caught in a cul-de-sac. A spring-like form connects his straining body with a prior moment in the journey like an involuntary memory. No constructivist ever allowed himself such real-world antics, never mind the tragi-comical fall of one of two chimerical constructed girls in "Of the Fate of Two Maidens" (1921) (app.2, p.137 v.)

As well as challenging their rather cold abstractions, Klee used Constructivist linear structure to poke fun at the "technological positivism" of Constructivists like Moholy-Nagy which accompanied this scientific art.142 Tower and Jordan both saw Klee's "Limits of the Intellect" (1927) (app.1, p.124) as a parody of Gabo's design for a radio tower. To Gabo's affirmation of rationalism and technology as society's salvation, Klee opposes a portrait of a jerry-rigged, provisional human intellect-face comprised of rickety ladders propped up towards the sky, higher and higher, and--completely missing the mark of the cosmic symbol of completion, which shines on them like an untouchable sun, replacing Gabo's conic megaphone atop the radio tower.143 Klee used pure line as did the Constructivists, but sometimes scratchily, or creating ambivalent and immaterial spatial effects; he used Constructivist empty space, but often rendered hazy, ambiva-

142 Jordan, Cubism, p. 465ff.
143 Tower, p. 177.

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lent or dark and deep; geometric shapes, but triangles alluding by context, color, texture and title to sailboats; circles made cosmic elements or, as in "Physiognomic Lightning" (1927) (app.1, p.124 v.), into faces cracked by lightning.

Summary

In conclusion, I'd like to quote Jordan on another two pictures which straddle the border between figurative and abstract, from Klee's Cubist period:

...in "Torment" [1913; app.1, p.122 v.] figures and landscape have been opened up and mutually interpenetrated as the formally interchangeable elements of a Cubist scaffold. In this small drawing, representation and structure have come close to identity.  

(My emphasis.) Speaking of "Fabulous Island" (1913) Jordan says

Here, unlike ["Flight to the Right" [app.1, p.122 v.] and "Abstraction II," both 1913], where the fable dissolves into abstraction, figuration flourishes in riotous integration with the non-representational elements. ...the abstract branches are inflected into planes by various kinds of hatching. Small signs representing eyes, beaks and claws are then 'salted' in, and all the elements are freely interspersed as graphic equivalents."

(My emphasis.) Jordan here observed an early key development in

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144 See Tower's illuminating discussion, in his Introduction, of important differences between Klee's most "Constructivist" work and that of his more orthodox peers in a three-way comparison between Kandinsky's "Points in an Arc," 1927, Klee's "Boats in the Dark," 1927, and Moholy-Nagy's "D IV," 1922. Klee and Kandinsky dealt with the same basic formal theme in many of the same ways, but Klee's is set apart from Kandinsky's by his use of a figurative vs. a purely descriptive title. See below, app.2, p.140, "The Ships Depart."


146 Ibid.

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Klee's work, though he didn't extrapolate its importance for twentieth century art. I would like to suggest that Klee founded a pictorial world where depicted natural forms and human-generated abstract formations interface effortlessly, as if two sides of one coin—or, more precisely, of one symbol. It opened the door to an art in which abstract, purely formal elements coexist with those illusionistically or iconically representing our work world. The abstract forms lend the figurative elements a sense of absolute significance and enduring being; and the abstract, seemingly elemental or ideal, enduring forms are brought into our physical world by association, as if they had physical mass and duration. As well, "minimal allusions" like geometric forms or signs like the arrow, number or letter, shift one's mind to new associations depending on their placement in context with other forms. So they perform representational functions, which in turn forces a jogging of the categories of reception and interpretation in the viewer and hence, a seeing, a looking with fresh eyes at both art and the world. Klee was creating new symbols as he created a new way of making symbolic images. His initiative led to an art which was still communicative, as had been representational art in a time of greater homogeneity of symbolic language and knowledge, but nevertheless grounded in and predicated by the single artist's uniquely formulated process and hermeneutic. It's an art which starts from where the viewer is, with recognizable real-world representations or signs, but leads us into unfamiliar symbolic territory which we then may make our own.
CHAPTER FIVE: Beaux arts vs. the "primitive."

This chapter will sketch Klee's use of forms from outside the beaux arts, from his first experiments with raw scribbles of energy, then childlike schematics, folk signs, generic and non-art forms, his use of indigenous art, and some of the forms of the insane. We will see how progressively he compressed figuration to a kind of signing with rich symbols of multivalent but formally simple elements, with a look at two of his last works, which compress some of life's most dense experiences into modern ideograms. As mentioned above in the introduction (p. 5), I am following Pierce's usage of "primitive" to encompass not only the arts of indigenous people but folk art, children's art and that of the insane. What all these primitive arts have in common, like Klee's adaptations of them, is an aesthetic stressing wholistic visual concepts which combine abstraction and figuration.

Primitivism was a common artistic impulse arising in part from the new sciences of ethnography and psychology. But Dada, Surrealism, Die Brücke, der Blaue Reiter, Picasso, all abandoned primitive forms as temporary phases in their formal development, while Klee went far beyond the avant garde in his diversity of forms and motifs echoing various primitive arts. He rarely quoted any source directly but rather paraphrased, reinterpreted, and made the forms and formative process his own, drawing on the sources throughout his life as needed, not in any systematic way.

After the horrors of World War I, artists like the Dadaists had called for a new language to replace what they considered a corrupted one, corrupting society. This was precisely Klee's brief, in going beyond Goethe's thought (see ch.2, p.8, above) to
the belief that art can show us even more of reality than reality can. Paradoxically he did this by returning to the least developed art forms, the "primitive."

Childrens' Scribbles and Schematicism

Klee apparently took seriously Baudelaire's aphorism: "Genius is no more than childhood recaptured at will." 147 At the scribbling stage, children are interested in the activity more than the resulting form. When he did the Candide illustrations in 1911, Klee delighted in the gesturing which both produced and comprised energetic scribbles, which both were and remain traces of the artist's thought, their direction, darkness and configurations changing with the moods and situations of the characters. 148 In "War, Which Destroys the Land" (1914) (app. 1, p.125) the scribbles and thick black lines (suggestive of cannons) are visual analogs of horrendous destruction. Scrubby remnants of vegetation are suggested by a mere delicate spiral at the left—a "minimal allusion." Klee said in early 1914

Graphic work [is] the expressive movement of the hand holding the recording pencil— which is essentially how I practice it... . 149

As we have seen, the record of the process of making remained in—or comprised much of—Klee's finished works.


148 Klee noted that he was quick to lose interest once the form was complete. This too is child-like. "In my productive activity, every time a type grows beyond the stage of its genesis, and I have about reached the goal, the intensity gets lost very quickly, and I have to look for new ways...becoming is more important than being. -Diaries, no. 928, p. 307 (April 22, 1914).

149 Ibid.

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A young child is still exploring the world by drawing, not yet having mastered the world enough to make optical or conventional resemblances of it. I agree with Pierce that Klee brought this fundamental function of form-making back into art in this century:

As Klee's line grew so did his drawings. Klee helped change the very concept of art as the working out of a preconceived subject, substituting for it a process of spontaneous generation. Klee's scribble drawings, as the presentational scribbles of children, were not developed from the start as the pictures of something but as something in themselves.

Children eventually enter a schematic stage— and so did Klee. Werckmeister compares a six year old's drawing (1905) of a snowball fight with Klee's "Children as Actors" (1913) (app. 1, p. 12).

Kerchensteiner used...[this] drawing to point out that even with such a potentially dramatic subject, the child at the "schematic" stage remained confined to meaningless stereotype repetition. Klee, on the contrary, developed out of the diagonal figure scheme a wide variety of flexible movements, expressive gestures, and excited compositions. The emotional intensity of these drawings is indicated by their especially funny or enigmatic titles. That is, paradoxically, Klee used reduction to generic form as if to paradigmatic form: to enrich and expand allusive meanings. The poetic titles give them away: "Violent Death," "Self-Glorification," "The Higher Spirit in Mourning over the Lower," "The Future as Burden," "Praise of Fertility" (all 1912), many dealing with sexuality; "The Poisonous Animal" (1913),

150 Arnheim, p. 254.
152 Pierce, Primitive, p. 104.
"Mating in the Air" (1912), "Don Juan or the Last Stage of Amorousness," "Temptation of a Policeman," and "Crouching Couple" (all 1913). These are hardly children's themes! Nor are they the themes of decorative folk art, nor of primitive art, being mostly too abstract, poetic or personal. These are the titles of late nineteenth century Decadent allegory, albeit more often absurd than morbid, puncturing even the pretensions of allegorical art. Some of the drawings of 1912 were inspired by Faust, one of Klee's old favorites. In them we see German Romantic images, motifs, ideas and themes which would recur in Klee's work throughout his life: spirits, stars, children, eternity, mystery, soaring, the moon, images of the feminine. Klee visually treated the serious text in a sketchy and farcical style. Each picture then was a symbol with a polar disparity in tone between representation and text/title (what it "is"), resulting in a vivid, engaging dialectic of meaning.

Blaue Reiter/Cubism/Folk signs.

Klee began developing recurring motifs and symbols in 1912—geometric forms like circles or hexagons, functioning as symbols of heavenly bodies. These were, at this time, related to precedents in folk art, and to Chagall, and Metzinger and Delaunay in their neo-Impressionist styles, rather than to a Constructivist influence. He used these familiar signs and symbols of folk art, for the most part, to allude to Romantic ideas. Sun and moon signs, for example, referred to the totality

154 Such parody of an art form has antecedents in the stinging literary sendups of their contemporaries by the Schlegels, Arnim, Brentano, and Tieck. -Walzel, part II, chapter III, pp. 185-223.

155 Franciscono, p. 352, note 29. Kandinsky and Marc also were using geometric forms as shorthand for dematerialized natural subjects.

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of the cosmos, to fate, or more immediate large controlling forces. Circles, grids and stars were introduced in "Torment" and "Abstraction II." In the Tunisian watercolors of 1914, these signs are used as a shorthand for landscape areas, walls, roofs, fences, and architectural details.\(^\text{156}\) In "Death on the Battlefield" (1914)\(^\text{(app.1, p.125)}\) they can read alternately as bombs, shrapnel and/or body parts— as the weapon or as the victim in pieces. In "Jerusalem" these forms read as tower walls or figures, in "Nature Theater" as landscape elements, or the sun. Jordan rightly observes:

> This amalgam [of abstraction and figuration] unites form and content in a way unique to Klee among twentieth century artists...It permits a decorative and lyric quotient which—unique in the Cubist-abstract tradition, which generally abhorred decorativeness—did not compromise his seriousness of form.\(^\text{157}\)

And Clement Greenberg said in his 1941 *Partisan* review:

> Klee's feeling for design is...ornamental...in small format, in the tradition of...illuminated manuscripts and...books and pictures for very private possession, hung upon the walls of a familiar and personal interior. This is Dutch, German, bourgeois...requires close scrutiny...concentrates rather than disperses visual attention...can be detailed and complicated.\(^\text{158}\)

By both the above accounts, Klee's romantic irony permitted entry of what would have been unacceptable to the avant garde otherwise. The ornamental quality and folk images were accompanied by the opposite— the high seriousness of twentieth century abstract form.

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\(^{156}\) See for example "Carpet of Memory" (1914), in which is much flickering passage.

\(^{157}\) Jordan, *Cubism*, p. 146.


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Stars and hearts were also ubiquitous in folk art and are prevalent in Klee. The heart first appears in 1917, alluding to many meanings: source of life, as in "Twins" (1930) (app.2, p.140 v.), where the interlocked figures share one; sorrow, when it bleeds or cries ("Dance of the Mourning Child," 1921); hope of love, as when a figure is shown wearing his heart in his mouth (same painting); life, as in "Ab Ovo" (1917) or when seen as a stemmed leaf in "Arab Song" (1913) (app.2, p.141 v.).

By 1918 in "With the Eagle" (app.1, p.124 v.) and 1919, in "Composition with Windows" Klee began to introduce shorthand signs based on and suggesting natural objects which would recur again and again, like the simplified figurations of folk art: a simple, symmetric plant silhouette or feather "is" a tree; spots may be leaves (former) and distant trees or bird feathers (latter), depending on their context; the arch appears, and the large staring eye, sometimes represented by a fermata. Meanings and valences on both form and content could be reassigned from picture to picture, as Pierce, Jordan and Thurlemann note.¹⁵⁹ These signs also are as flexible in meaning as they are in size or shape, depending on context: a comb form can read as a mouth, a hand, a flower, or simply as a rhythmic element. The process is synthetic rather than analytic: the signs generate associations,

¹⁵⁹ Pierce, "Primitive," p. 17; Jordan, Cubism, pp.195-6; Felix Thurlemann, Paul Klee: Analyse Sémiotique de Trois Peintres, Paris, Éditions L'Age d'Homme, 198, p. 11. Jordan thinks Klee's separation of form and content is practically unique in twentieth century art. Without committing oneself to such a sweeping statement, it is interesting to contrast Kandinsky, for example, whose romantic contents became fixedly embodied in particular formal elements, e.g.:
"Red is... assertion... [It] is distinguished from yellow and blue by its characteristic of lying firmly on the plane, and from black and white by an intensive inner seething-a tension within it." - Wassily Kandinsky, Point and Line to Plane, New York, Dover Publications Inc., 1979, p. 65. "The obtuse angle is passive, cool, and associated with light blue." -Ibid, p. 73. (Emphases mine.)
rather than the sign being assigned to one particular message. Klee uses a sign as a word is used in poetry, which both by its sound and its placement relative to other words can generate many different meanings.

**Psychotic art**

For Kandinsky, the individual artist was a vessel for the communication of spiritual truth to humanity; and Franz Marc also believed art must be in the service of some higher truth beyond the individual. Klee's emphasis was on the peculiar value of the individual's expression, not the mystical, sometimes sentimental community of Kandinsky and Marc. For Klee, the individual artist was a god over his cosmos which he generated out of his own inner being in being responsive to a cosmic source. His is "a moral vision without obligations," an outlook echoing Kierkegaard and, ultimately, the genius theory, individualism and irony of the German Romantics. Klee therefore was alone amongst the avant-garde in finding the art of the insane an instructive source. Yet Klee, like Kierkegaard, did not

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161 Klee's 1902 diary gave his view of the merits of the individual versus the collective: "Affect the world, but not as part of a multiplicity like bacteria, but as an entity, down here, with connections to what is up there." -*Diaries*, no. 421, p. 123 (June 1902).

162 Franciscono, p. 169.

163 Walzel, pp. 16-17, 44, 46-47, 75.

164 This was too much for Kandinsky or Marc. Klee had met Dr. Prinzhorn, psychiatrist and art historian, and seen his study on the art of psychotics. -*LWD*, p. 182-3 and Franciscono, p. 230. Pierce draws fascinating parallels between Klee's drawings and those of one of Prinzhorn's artistic patients, Baron Heinrich Welz. See James Smith Pierce, "Paul Klee and Baron Welz," *Arts Magazine*, vol.52, no.1, September 1977, pp.128-131.

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advocate irresponsibility, and he was careful to distinguish his
aesthetic concern for form from the more content-focused
practices of the insane or of children.\textsuperscript{165}

Klee found he could create the illusion of movement with the
simplest possible means, an arrow or a pair of walking legs. He
had begun adding the little walking legs sign to houses, windows,
trees or abstract shapes, as in "Bewitched in Red" (1926) where a
woman is abducted by just a pair of legs, a pictorial idea akin
to the drawings of "sexually obsessed schizophrenics."\textsuperscript{166}
"Polyphonic Architecture" (1930) is infinitely repetitive like
the obsessive art of the insane, as is "Beride (Water City)"
(1927)(app.1, p.127). Klee saw here another rhythmic generating
process, with forms sometimes reminiscent of certain decorative
folk art, like the indigenous art of Tunis. Architectural vistas
built of repetitive geometric motifs and symbols like "A Page
from the Book of Cities" (1928) simultaneously

movingly evoke in simple diagrams the orderly array of
a landscape, the temporal flight of civilizations which
end their terms as layers of architectural sediment,
and the cryptic patterns of an ancient script, itself a

\textsuperscript{165} "Although he accepted chance effects and let his pictures
grow like plants, avoiding preconceived notions of the final form,
his work can hardly be called...compulsive.... As Prinzhorn points
out, 'irony is by its very nature excluded [from the art of
schizophrenics] because it always refers to commonly accepted
conventions, the very thing the schizophrenic has excluded from his
thought.'...Klee...sought ultimate knowledge rather than mere
"...'[my] primitiveness is explained through my disciplined
reduction to a few steps. It is only economy, and thus the ultimate
professional experience...the opposite of real primitiveness." -Werckmeister, "Childhood," pp. 145, 144, quoting from Paul Klee,
Tagebücher von Paul Klee 1898-1918, (Köln, 1957), no. 857, p. 248
(Spring/summer 1909).

\textsuperscript{166} Pierce, \textit{Primitive}, p. 138

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fragment of the past.\footnote{Franciscono, p. 264.}

The remains of an entire civilization have something almost sacred about them in the sheer weight of lost memory buried there; and, fittingly, they are rendered here in marching little lines as of cuneiform writing in the permanence of stone. Yet the drawing resembles the obsessive style of the psychotic, too. Both one of the most permanent sorts of records and one of the least socially valued of records, done by one whose experience is least continuous with others' shared reality, are evoked at the same time.

\textbf{Indigenous arts}

Jordan notes that since Klee renewed his interest in indigenous arts in the early twenties, it is likely he got the idea for "Senecio" (1922)\footnote{Jordan, \textit{Cubism}, p. 185.}, at least subconsciously, from the disc-headed dolls of the West African Ashanti which he had known since at least 1913, and which it so resembles.\footnote{Ibid, p. 184.} At the same time, in "Senecio" Jordan finds the best example of Klee's transition from cubistic to constructivist stylistic features and his integration of both their working techniques at that time into his own longstanding focus on "facial types and the psychology of expression,"\footnote{See Margaret Plant, \textit{Paul Klee and Nature}, London, Thames and Hudson Inc., 1978.} which had begun with the masks done as part of the "Inventions."\footnote{Ibid, p. 184.} The face is gridded within its circle, and color passage makes its surface seem to undulate along the grid lines in shallow space. The eyes are generated by an infinity sign: their asymmetry causes them to appear to be rotating on their fulcrum. Once
again, an abstract sign, this one borrowed from the language of mathematics, strangely doubles as a representational element, joining the seeing human, or flattening the human, to the irreal realm of mathematics. It also implies the range of vision to which the human being might, at least would like, to attain--the infinite. Once again, Klee joins two extremes: an infinity, the quintessential romantic concept, with its utilitarian, abstract mathematical sign, and these two meet in the human countenance.

Pierce notes the prevalence of figures with over-sized heads like this or with masks in many indigenous and folk arts, the European Middle Ages and in children's art. Both were favorite motifs of Klee. Yet unlike the masked citizens of Nolde or Ensor, which Klee had seen in the first years of the century, primitive masks do not hide the social role of the wearer as much as confer the powers of the represented spirit on him. "Mask of Fear" (1932) (app.1, p.128) recalls masks made to cover the whole body, not in order to hide the wearer but to take to him a spirit's being or to scare off spirits. Klee's mask covers the whole body except the legs: the whole man is covered with the spirit of fear.

Pierce documents Klee's affinities with and borrowings from Columbian, African, Aztec, Mayan, Peruvian, Mexican, Oceanic, Scandinavian, Innuit art and Franco-Cantabrian rock art.
paintings in the Spanish Levant, the Sahara and South Africa. Klee's continued predilection for primitive art increasingly set him apart from his Bauhaus peers from the twenties on. It did however link him with erstwhile Dadaists, now Surrealists, who enthusiastically claimed him as their own (as had Dada and Blaue Reiter).

Non-art elements

In 1916 Klee brought numbers, exclamation points, fermatas and arrows into his pictures. These did double duty as suns, moons, eyes and hearts. They are not cubistically modelled in space, but rather Klee lets these double-entendres remain flat, occupying an indeterminate virtual space. In contrapuntal, zigzagging works of 1917-20 he used musical notations as pictorial elements, as in "Drawing with the Fermata" of 1918 (app.1, p. 128 v.). They recur throughout his various script pictures of the early twenties, and into the structured pictures of signs and abstract elements like "House of the Opera Bouffe" (1925)(app.1, p.129).

Text in a painting gets us used to, among other things, the idea of pictures having a temporal quality, suggesting the reading process. Graphic elements, letters and text as used by Picasso and Braque in collage were perhaps responses to the clutter and clatter of accelerating city life, with its spaces and silences ever shortening before the advent of electricity, the telephone, the auto and the cabaret or music hall. By contrast, graphic elements appeared in ambiguous, soft space in Klee's pictures, with enigmatic metaphysical or psychological

175 Ibid, pp. 53, 54, 57, 66, 135.

titles, prompting rather contemplation of the relation of world to our visual and verbal representation of it. Klee may have also seen Apollinaire's "calligram" of 1914,\(^{177}\) or Marinetti's "phonetic, telegraphic, typographic use of language."\(^{178}\) But Klee took letters in art far beyond Marinetti, Schwitters or even Miró, who came closest to Klee in concretizing semantic signs in pictorial space. Klee actually gave them symbolic presence in the shallow virtual space of the painting. Kagan speculates—I tend to agree—that this idea arose at least as much from his lifelong immersion in reading music as from the example of Marinetti.\(^{179}\) Playing music meant transforming flat black signs into invisible but space-filling music. How fitting that Klee should become fascinated with the practice of giving virtual bodies in space to letters, which are the flat, black signs of thought and experience. While he experimented with structural color (see ch. 3, pp.39-43 and ch.4, p.56, above), these "script pictures," begun 1915 and coming to maturity in the twenties (app.2, pp.143-145\(^{180}\)), created another new mode of representation. In "Once Emerged From the Grey of Night" (1918)(app.1, p.129) he achieved Cubist passage in planes receding and protruding from the lines—now physical "edges"—of letters. To take this picture/poem

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\(^{177}\) Apollinaire's "Heart Crown Mirror" consisted of the typed letters of a poem forming a heart shape. —Temkin, MOMA, p. 17.


\(^{179}\) Kagan, p. 119.

\(^{180}\) "Script pictures" comprise several of Grohmann's categories: his "script," "plant script pictures," "postscripts and new beginnings," "humor of late years," "late pastels," "sign images," "large pictures," "pictures of ideas," and some of "tragic, demonic, forebodings of death" and "requiem." Grohmann's categories are useful but at times confusing, referring as they do to style, subject, mood, even size changes in the works.

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picture/poem "literally" means abstract signs of verbal communication become spatial figures, as if features of a landscape or strange architecture; and the poem written with them simultaneously suggests spaces, volumes, houses, fields, nights and days. In "Human Script" (1924)(app.1, p.130 v.), Klee reversed his procedure and had figurative elements—human beings—comprise or represent the abstract signs of the alphabet, like ghastly letters strung on barbed wire, or (perhaps) on the lines of lined paper, or on lines of fate in his cosmos.

Klee continued to find new ways to merge the various spaces of writing, thought, drawing, feeling:

The fluid space of Klee's pictures mirrors the space of 'the mind's eye,' which images together all our perceptions, fantasies, calculations and desires...In [Astray, 1923 (app.1, p.131)] Klee has conflated a physical space with a symbolic one...The arrow, an actual physical implement that goes from here to there, has been lifted onto the plane of idea. Hence, the arrow signifies movement, or more abstractly, the will to such movement. This simple fact underlies the possibility of road signs.181

But Klee was moving in the opposite direction, taking ordinary signs and making them into poetic symbols. In "Temple of Longing" (1922)(app.1, p.131) we see the arrow apparently emanating from abstract/Constructivist structures, alluding to quite a concrete subject matter: human longing for God. Klee asked us to look at the utilitarian arrow (in its new context) and see spiritual direction, flirtation, possibility, promise, desire, thought, will. Klee said of his arrow:

The father of every force of movement or projectile, and hence of the arrow, was the thought: how can I extend my reach over there?...Man's ability to traverse the earthly and the supernatural in spirit as opposed to his physical impotence is the original human tragedy. ...The consequence of this simultaneous impotence of body and mobility of spirit is the dichotomy of human existence....thought [is the] medium

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181 Temkin, op. cit., MOMA, p. 23.

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between earth and cosmos...

In "Astray" (1923) the letters "irr" inhabit the same space as the man and woman. How are we to effect "closure" of this incomplete word?

**Irre**...adj crazy, mad; I*(r) mf lunatic; -führen vt to mislead; machen vt. to confuse; n vi to be mistaken; (umherirren) to wander, to stray vr to be mistaken; l"nanstalt f lunatic asylum

irrig ...adj incorrect, wrong

irr- zW: i"sinnig adj mad, crazy; (umg) terrific; "tum {-s, -tumer} m mistake, error; i"tümlich adj mistaken

From what we know of Klee, I would suggest all the above allusions are at home in this space, and more.

By including more and more abstract forms and signs in his paintings, Klee created new ways of painterly representation, while at the same time paring down his actual visual elements to a minimum. In this way each element has maximum impact, and in several ways at once; so his pictures have the combined economy and connotative richness of poetry. For example, let's look at Klee's "View of the Severely Threatened City of Pinz" (1915)(app.1, p.131 v.). The arrows put us in a clinical or *scientistic* mode of mind, a *social* mind to read road directions or those to an air raid shelter, ladies' room, exit or stairs; a mind tuned to a printed advertisement or aviso--all the ways we see arrows in a citified existence--yes, this is a city. Arrows also often indicate a vector of force in a diagrammatic way, so the title and the dark tones in the area we'd read as "sky" in a traditional representational painting cue us to see these arrows as threatening, aggressive intentions, to psychologically "see"

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danger, and at the same time--suddenly we're also seeing this "as if" it were a traditional, quasi-perspectival virtual space, because of the "sky." We read all these associations and many more which are now attached to this simple, universally recognized arrow shape, and are directed to "see"/imaginate this scene psychologically, diagramatically, and optically (as with a traditional painting). A great richness is achieved with very spare means.

The picture as combination of real and psychological space--a big flat arrow of threat flying through a "real" sky--is unexpected, seems momentarily incongruous, even whimsical, and so throws us off into humor a moment. The lettered signs put us in mind of a real location, designated here as succinctly as on a map. We are oriented thus spatially, pinned down to something of our own world which is the projected center of all the evoked associations and feelings in this picture. These signs are set in a context of purely expressive formal elements with their own emotional resonance. But we begin to imagine mountains in the rhythmic angles upper left, threatening storm clouds in the dark washes over them; the dark, long interlocked forms in center are now sooty smokestacks, streets and railway trestles. The black circles and squares suggest houses or gathering places for worried knots of winter-coated figures. Crowds of dots may be soldiers or citizens or fearful sheep; clustered triangles could indicate tents or houses. Receding and radiating lines suggest telephone/telegraph wires, radio towers and roads to and from Pinz. There is what looks like radio tower with a flag on it in the foreground. We are tantalized with just the bare minimum of "stick" figuration to "see" a real city.

The radio tower--the round shape with dark center in foreground (for it's now a landscape with a foreground)--is repeated further back at least twice, and these forms in turn optically suggest staring, unsleeping, maybe anxious eyes. So we
are brought back to signs which also "look like" what they "are," into the psychological aspect of the depicted situation. These bald unblinking eyeballs are unnerving. The jumble that is the city beneath the stacked mountains and the streaking forces that threaten seems drawn with a childish hand, which turns us in yet another direction. It is a signal to let ourselves play, and also to imaginatively be the child who sees and renders a (his?) city so threatened— how terrifying! So again we are pulled in two directions at once— to play freely and to be terrified, with a child's intuitive acuity and his impotence.

Late mature works: script pictures become hieroglyphics.

Klee wrote:

I place myself at a more remote starting point of creation, where I assume, a priori formulas for men, beasts, plants, stones and the elements, and for all the whirling forces.  

He wanted to see life "from such a detached distance that all living objects and things can be reduced to 'formulas,'" as he put it in 1916. Specific signs— "more highly abstracted and generalized forms than either naturalistic depiction or symbolic motifs would allow for—" enabled him to present his concept of nature and reality in terms of these symbolic "formulas."

As I hope is clear by now, these "formulae" did not consist in visual conceptual equations into which could be plugged the variables of various situations and personalities. In that case Klee would have been merely overhauling the practice of allegory. His pictures never became formulaic, because each began with a different problematic and procedure to suit it, and the forms and

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184 Diaries, no. 1008, p. 343 (July 1916).
185 Tower, p. 81.
186 Ibid, p. 76.

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signs generated associations accordingly. But his figures and forms got ever simpler as he tried to get at a truly unifying synthesis of his dichotomous reality. He believed (not unreasonably, in his time) that the development of language and formative capacity in a child recapitulates that of primitive man. He also believed man started with complex symbols, which eventually were simplified to signs and thence to abstract characters of alphabets:

At the dawn of civilization, when writing and drawing were the same thing,...the most primitive of elements, the line...was the basic element. And as a rule our children begin with it... . But one can't remain primitive for long.\(^{187}\)

In his last years, then, in works like "The Red Waistcoat" (1938)(app.1, p.130 v.), we see Klee reducing all the forms familiar to us, beyond semi-abstract schematic pictures to ideograms.\(^{188}\) But these were not of the primitive past, nor were they uncommunicative because not in our language. The very forms evoke associations in us; Klee knows we inhabit a visually dense world. In other words, Klee simplified down to the minimal elements which would evoke in the viewer allusions and associations in all directions. He counted on the viewer seeing poetically, as it were: seeing, in his art, as he saw in nature and art, symbols of unseen things. Klee hoped that by getting close to the very boundary between representation (symbols) and abstraction (alphabet letters, signs), where there is the least amount of figurative information, there he might generate the

\(^{187}\) Paul Klee, lecture notes, date unknown, Notebooks vol. I, p. 103.

\(^{188}\) Pierce observes that picture writing develops from the schematic mode, and that children begin to develop their own pictograms when they've grasped the concept of writing, and may support their early writing with pictograms. "In the various historical systems of picture writing such recognizable schemata became increasingly abstract until they were hardly more than conventional symbols." -Pierce, Primitive, p. 140.

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maximum number of allusions. It is as if he hoped to create a new alphabet, but one not of dryly signifying conventional signs but of multivalent symbols, each character a symbol in itself. Remember (p.70 above) that Klee had begun to use walking legs; now he found he only needed two diagonal lines to create movement.

In the disembodied pair of legs Klee had found a sign so suggestive of human movement that it was in fact used by the ancient Egyptians as a determinative for "walk" and "go."\(^{189}\) Klee may have seen this hieroglyph on his 1928 trip to Egypt. It is also used by many primitive cultures and by children at a certain stage. Wherever Klee got it, it is because he already understood the power of the simple diagonal that this natural sign of movement appealed to him.\(^{190}\)

Pierce here assumes the existence of "natural signs," as if there were a universal visual grammar men have only to discover, and it is their children who do so; but this is precisely what Klee sought.

The last works of Klee (1937-40) attempt the most exalted requirements of the German Romantic aesthetic: that a work be untranslatable into words but arouse an infinity of allusions and interpretations;\(^{191}\) that the form of the symbol be analogous to what it represents, as in onomatopoeia or metaphor;\(^{192}\) that it be a complete organismic whole in itself, yet mysteriously signify (communicate) with allusions to other entities and

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\(^{189}\) Ibid, p. 139.

\(^{190}\) Ibid, p. 139.


\(^{192}\) Ibid, p. 179.

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meanings. Klee was re-poeticizing arbitrary signs, lines, forms, re-establishing them as poetic analogies to nature and the cosmos. He felt that symbols had evolved to more abstract ideograms, thence to alphabet; now he made as if to take us forward to a new primitiveness, the beginning of a new language, by reducing our most complex symbols—western avant garde art—to signs, signs which yet retain the surplus of meaning only a symbol has. The German Romantics had evinced an idea of the efficacy of such a move, in their fascination with hieroglyphs. Neumeyer noted that Novalis, F. Schlegel and then Runge all "took refuge in the theory of the hieroglyph as the last refuge of art." In it, said A.W. Schlegel,

"The infinite [is brought] to the surface and [given] appearance...symbolically, in images and signs.'

[Neumeyer remarks that] Here we find forced together...the infinity of romantic longing and the most definite of abbreviations of visibility, the sign or hieroglyph,

in which sense was thought to be magically enclosed. Painter Otto Runge thought

The thing would lead much more to the use of arabesques and hieroglyphics, but from this landscape must result. At that time no acceptable visual art forms had developed to embody the ideas of the Romantics' aesthetic, nor could Runge see any way forward besides the forms of traditional landscape. I believe that it fell to Klee to develop such forms.

In the end he returned to the dynamic line with which he had begun his career, but now a broad, brushy, painterly line. He

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presents symbols which look like simple signs— but they are signs which don't give direction, and the ones which look like letters and words aren't in a known language. But they look familiar, and we look closer, and discover they are symbols, mysteriously complete in themselves yet evoking in us associations to many things outside themselves. In "The Red Waistcoat" (1938)(app.1, p.130 v.) we may see a figure smiling—or trying to right himself as he falls backwards—holding aloft a vessel with Klee's walking legs/person in it. A zig-zag chart line connected to his smile or body may indicate his temperature or other condition fluctuating—or may be mountains in the background. He seems to balance on the back or in the embrace of another walking person: the supportive line drops a tear after dropping sharply down and out from an exclamation mark of surprise. A dark sun or moon appears in the distance. The walking person is in turn walking along the supportive line attached to another walker, which bends down over him protectively and also as if sniffing the ground before him. Under the protective support is a human face, his one open eye being captured by a dancing or running person, running away into the distance. There are an many ways to "read" these signs and their relationships, since they arose out of the infinite density of the artist's experience in our world. Another painting of this period, in the last year of his life, 1940, is irony in colors of dusk. Knowing he was dying of scleroderma, Klee relativized even his own death, making it part of a larger order, the order of art. He seemed to acknowledge another center to his universe besides his ironical self, against which he could not counterbalance anything, and painted his own fate relative to that center. In "Death and Fire" (1940)(app.1, p.132) we see the uncanny sight of a death head presenting itself playfully, its grimace a little smile, its empty eye sockets two little circles. Its hand seems raised in greeting, but no, we see it holds a larger circle, sign of perfection, completion, cosmic order,
celestial bodies. An armless man walks through colors of red earth. He is contained in an ocher enclosure on the death figure's shoulder—or behind it—because the space of the painting oscillates between total flatness and an illusion of indeterminate depth, wherein the figure of death who occupies the foreground seems to have walked up to the other side of the window through which we look, peering in at us whom he will also come to claim. The Renaissance "window" effect of perspectival art is eerily reversed; the viewer becomes the "other;" the one viewing the canvas is the object of scrutiny. Klee found the larger order encompassed death, himself and us in an enduring dynamic: his place before the canvas is taken by the viewers who will always stand before it; and he is kept alive in his art, which keeps watch on us.

But this was not his last word. Klee's last picture was "Untitled" (1940) (app.1, p.132 v.), a sort of summation in line and color, figuration and abstraction, depiction and signs. I quote Comte's wonderful interpretation, which exemplifies the poetic vision Klee wants us to bring to his pictures:

...the statue, coffee pot, and vases no longer seem to have the same meaning...In the encompassing night, each one is lit by its own light... Whether for a happy death or birth, the angel's hands are squeezed together. The light of the yellow moon is like the last ray of hope! The flowers strewn over the orange tray, on which the coffee pot and the statue rest, have just been cut and are curling in the light and life that they have left. The flowers are tears that have fallen from the objects and are the characters of a strange alphabet waiting to be formed into a language, characters in search of meaning. However, at the top of the painting, as if planted in the blue vase, two flowers have conquered eternity and live with their strange roots in a unique and definitive red light.  

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Summary

Klee conceived his ironic subjectivity as a conduit for a cosmic origin of form in nature, art, architecture and music. He applied his two-edged irony to the ossified forms of academic art, rendering classical nudes in satirical style and using Decadent allegorical themes. He relativized the self-proclaimed absolutes of avant-garde styles like Cubism and Constructivism by using their own forms against them, juxtaposing abstract form with literal content and thus making figurative symbols of "pure" abstract styles; by allowing abstract form to develop into figurative form, even ornament; by not resting in static forms but concentrating on the process, and letting the process show in the finished static work, in several ways: by letting the process grow like a plant and have rhythms like music; by letting its elements fire off associations in all directions like the words in a poem, and by mixing in folk signs, graphics, text and executing many in a "primitive" or childlike hand. Further, he violated the cultural sanctity of serious subject matter, like genius ("Genius Serving Breakfast," 1920), spiritual redemption ("Up, Away, and Out," 1919), love ("Arrow Approaching the Target," 1921) death ("Death and Fire," 1940), even God Himself: in "The Creator," 1934 (app.2, p.140 v.), God trips the light fantastic as if having as much fun as was Klee). Klee's irony relativized all things, so we might look through and beyond them to the absolute origin of all things.

198 Schelling spoke of the "spirit of nature" with which the artist must actually compete, which he must imitate and whose "look" he must capture in his own art forms. -Todorov, p. 169, quoting Schelling's Oration on the Relation between the Plastic Arts and Nature (VII, p. 302).

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CHAPTER SIX: Implications

Hegel wrote that it was F. Schlegel who invented irony as a literary device, and Tieck and Solger who made it the supreme principle of art. For Hegel it was a purely destructive device:

...This virtuosity of an ironical artistic life apprehends itself as a divine creative genius for which anything and everything is only an unsubstantial creature, to which the creator, knowing himself to be disengaged and free from everything, is not bound, because he is just as able to destroy it as to create it. ...the ironical, in the individuality of the genius, lies in the destruction of the noble, great and excellent. ...the art-formations too will have to display only the principle of absolute subjectivity, by showing forth what has worth and dignity for mankind as null in its self-destruction.... There is then to be no seriousness about law, morals and truth...nothing in what is lofty and best.199

Harvey Gross wrote more recently

...Irony as Nietzsche understood it [was] the period style of the modern world and of its spiritually deprived inhabitants, the epigones... . [Quoting Nietzsche:] "Through this excess is planted the always damaging belief in the old age of mankind, the belief that we are latecomers and epigones; through this excess an age reaches a dangerous mood of irony toward itself."

...Modernity...negated the possibility of the autonomous masterpiece.200


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(Emphases mine.) Although he was a remarkably quiet, private, law-abiding, bourgeois artist, didn't Klee in fact "set up and dissolve everything...law, morals and truth" in his art? His satire pictorially levelled the society he lived in, reducing its prominent citizens and policemen to helpless, gesticulating, transparent puppets. His often primitive-looking or childlike art flies in the face of the high seriousness and long pedigree of the painterly tradition, received via Knirr and Stuck from Otto Runge, Leonardo, Raphael and their forbears, to which he is heir. He confused the ironclad categories separating the beaux arts and the primitive or non-professional. Is this evidence that Modernism produces no masterpieces? Did Klee exercise a purely destructive irony of, in this case, the painterly tradition in turn of the century Germany? Didn't Klee fail to transmit to us what is valuable and serviceable in the tradition? If so, things are more serious than Hegel proposes, since in our fragmented time we urgently need connection with what is good in our collective past, as well as in each other and in ourselves. If so, Klee gives us a serpent for a fish, because good art feeds people in a unique way.

But I think rather that Klee has uniquely made available to us his eighteenth and nineteenth century heritage in an idiom we can assimilate. In this final chapter I will first talk about Klee's art in the light of the German Romantic aesthetic, particularly irony, to give a fuller, more positive picture than

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201 As Rudolf Arnheim charged in a 1930 review: "Paul Klee still ranks high in esteem and price. He owes that to the chance fact that his pictures and drawings are full of child-like figures and thus satisfy the demands of a bourgeoisie which recovers from the terrors of this great moment with their sofa dolls and assorted grotesque nicknacks, in flirtatious contempt for everything spiritual and problematic. One buys for many hundreds of marks a little sheet of paper on which a clumsy hand has painted a few twigs or manikins...while his contemporaries receive lessons in world history" — quoted in Werckmeister, "Childhood," p. 147, from Arnheim, "Klee für Kinder," die Weltbühne, 26, (1930), pp. 170-173.
what Hegel has so disapprovingly left us. From this discussion it will be evident that Klee developed his art, which we detailed in chapters one through five, precisely as a visual form of that ironic trope. Next we will look at the negative implications of this irony, and note reservations artists might well entertain in considering Klee as a model. Finally I will show how I propose to use Klee as a model for a normative Christian art, with some suggested alternatives to his characteristic dialectic.

Irony

By Todorov's account irony was, for F. Schlegel and the earlier Romantics, the heart of their new definition of symbol, and of the new definition of art work as symbol. According to F. Schlegel, irony was

...an absolute synthesis of absolute anti-theses, the ceaseless and self-creating exchange of two thoughts in conflict.  

The romantic Syntheticist doctrine held that in ironic literary art, the work of the genius would annihilate contradiction itself or (for Novalis) the very "principle of contradiction." Irony was seen as both synthetic in that it brought and kept together two opposites; and it was analytic in that they remained distinct, in tension, within the new symbol. Speaking of F. Schlegel's and the early romantics' idea of irony, Seyhan says

Irony...subjects...synthesis to the destructuring effect of time. As a rhetorical ploy, irony goes the analytic route. It originates in the critical examination of the presumed totality of representation... . irony points to the inherent fragmentariness of any vision that aspires to totality. Irony is the "form of paradox"... . Both irony and allegory forever pursue a temporal void where representation could ideally catch

202 Todorov, p. 184.


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Klee managed to convey visually the temporal implications in this concept of irony. He did so by incorporating the temporal, dynamic processes of creation into the forms of the motionless finished paintings; and he did so in at least six different ways, as we saw (ch. 3). In the first place, his pictures retain evidences of the processes of their making; then too, the viewer attends the pictorial elements in a certain sequence, by design. Thirdly, Klee sought to control the mood of the viewer as he views the picture sequentially, with changes of color, rhythmic patterns of darks and lights, and the irruptions of irreverent, irrelevant or otherwise surprising linear images. Fourthly, the polarity of opposites, sometimes more than one pair, the play or punning with meanings as well as with form and content within his pictures, engages the viewer in potentially endless oscillation or reflection within each polarity. Fifthly, as we have seen, the very fact of producing a constant stream of sketchy, fragmentary works leaves a visual record embodying interruptive irony as temporal trope, always restlessly moving on to another synthesis, leaving each picture—and each process or


205 "When a dot begins to move and becomes a line, this requires time. Likewise, when a moving line produces a plane, and when moving planes produces spaces.

Does a pictorial work come into being at one stroke? No, it is constructed bit by bit, just like a house.

And the beholder, is he through with the work at one glance? (Unfortunately he often is.) Does not Feuerbach say somewhere that in order to understand a picture one must have a chair? ...So that your tired legs won't distract your mind." —Paul Klee, "Creative Credo" [1920], Chipp, pp. 184-5, from the translation by Norbert Guterman in The Inward Vision: Watercolors, Drawings, Writings by Paul Klee, ed. by Werner Haftmann, New York, Abrams, 1958.

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"style"—which anew fails to capture the absolute reality which it sought, and trying again, and again. Finally, the triadic rhythm of temporal irony is concretized in some of Klee's recurring images, in particular the balancing acrobat or, abstractly, the compositional balancing of pictorial elements. See for example "Conjuring Trick" (1927), or "The Tightrope Walker" (1923) (app.1, pp.133 & 133v.) There are opposites to be balanced compositionally; and then there is some fulcrum point (in the acrobat), where the tension between all forces is maintained. In "Portrait of an Acrobat" (1927) (app. 1, p. 133), diagrammatic lines virtually analyzing the vectors of force converge in his focused mind as well as in his act: the face is actually comprised of these converging lines. The break in the groups of lines show the improbable stasis of the Tightrope Walker in space, maintained as always by conflicting dynamic forces. In a lecture Klee talked too about the dynamism of the individual point of view moving about the surface of the canvas, with the viewer's attention following the focus of the artist's attention and the point of his pencil on the page. By becoming dynamic in motion, the marked point becomes first a line, then a plane, finally a composition. Klee compares the corresponding balancing acts of making and of viewing his pictures to our walking: they are the balance and counterbalance of a moving "pictorial architecture" of motion.

What are we to do? Let us empathize, since we ourselves are after all buildings which have to stand on little feet and must not fall. What do we do in order not to fall? What do we do, if we do not succeed in re-establishing stationary calm (in a small way) through a balancing shift of the weighty parts in ourselves? We move first one leg (enlargement of the base) and perhaps soon afterwards the other. And finally we walk, which facilitates the balance. We have become a form in

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movement and we sense an alleviation.\textsuperscript{206}

It may at times seem fitting to think of Klee as an allegorist. If we were to use the later romantics' Creuzer's and Solger's dynamic (temporal) interpretation of allegory, Klee's works might be said to be allegorical as well as ironic/symbolic. When qualifying these concepts temporally, Creuzer defined allegory as

what analytic and synthetic reason bring together in a sequential series as individual features, with the [simultaneous] objective of developing a concept...\textsuperscript{207}

We have seen that this was indeed Klee's overall way of working. And there is one more criterion, that of Solger, on account of which one would like to reserve the right to "read" at least some of Klee's works allegorically:

"Just as, in the spirit of ancient art, essence and manifestation are always already unified symbolically in activity itself, so they are found here [in modern art] in an allegorical opposition that cannot be mediated save through the WIT [Witz], which brings together the separate relations of things and in so doing surmounts their isolated character."\textsuperscript{208}

Substitute "content and form" for "essence and manifestation," and this appears an irresistibly right characterization of Klee's work, with its ubiquitous wit.

...in the case of allegory...an irreducible and in a sense hopeless copresence of contraries, WIT comes to offer a means of releasing tension or, as Solger says, of sublation (\textit{Aufhebung}): allegory is a negation of a negation.\textsuperscript{209}


\textsuperscript{208} Todorov, p. 219, quoting Solger, \textit{Erwin}, p. 301.

\textsuperscript{209} Todorov, p. 220.

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This dynamic is what I have termed throughout this paper a visual dialectic of irony, après Hegel's derogatory definition, and the enthusiastic one of the earlier Romantics. I think it inadvisable to call Klee's work allegorical. Firstly, Solger's definition of temporal allegory is merely additive/synthetic, not dialectic/ironic, as is Klee's art. And there are associations with the word allegory from both the romantic painters and from nineteenth century academic art which render it problematic. Klee had to struggle against his student beginnings in nineteenth century pictorial allegory. What was prominent in the genre was the engineering of the image to embody a predetermined, usually literary concept, in direct opposition to the organic, symbol-growing art which Klee evolved. He would not have minded having his pictures called allegories in Solger's sense, I think; and it appears that most often he, like Solger, appropriated WITZ as mediating term. But "allegory" had been used in C.S. Lewis' sense in the art world for too long: in the sense of the planned signifying of commonly understood realities. We should rather speak of Klee as having created visual symbols of irony, which occasion a temporal dynamic of synthesizing and analyzing of meaning in constant play when the work is "read." An allegory is fixed and closed in its meanings, according to the German Romantics around the Schlegels; it stands only for some entity outside itself, which can be formulated verbally, and is intentionally manufactured to do so. This is a far cry from the symbolic (poetic, ironic) work, which is intransitive (expressing itself, not something else), yet paradoxically has surplus meaning and "signifies;" which is unconsciously generated; which expresses what cannot be expressed in words; which is a whole world complete in itself; and which at the same time generates multitudes of associations and possible interpretations. Klee's

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210 Todorov, pp. 206-7.

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works are generated analogously with natural forms, and at least partly unconsciously;\textsuperscript{211} their content is not wholly expressible in words, but generates an infinity of associations and interpretations;\textsuperscript{212} and his works combine contraries.\textsuperscript{213} This is especially evident in the works of Klee's last three years. In all these ways Klee's work fulfils the Schlegels' (et al) definition of symbolism.

Many of Klee's titles sound like those of allegories: "Cosmic Flora" (1923), "Oracle" (1922), "Eros" (1923), for example. One might argue Klee is creating allegories because often we often have to be told what these pictures "are," what content the forms represent, whether they are abstract or figurative. But they are rather poetic titles of symbolic pictures. They only give us clues as to where to begin to read. C.S. Lewis said the allegory is created to embody what we know; the symbolic is forms we know combined in an effort to bring to light, to form, what we don't yet know.\textsuperscript{214} As I hope the preceding chapters have shown, this was Klee's project.

\textbf{Other aspects of Romantic aesthetics in Klee's art}

Klee's art also embodies other aspects of the Romantic aesthetic. His irony by nature could never rest, could never finish its synthesizing task. Like the literary irony upon which Klee's

\textsuperscript{211} Todorov, p. 207.

\textsuperscript{212} Todorov, pp. 190-3.

\textsuperscript{213} Todorov, p. 185-7.

\textsuperscript{214} "The allegorist leaves the given--his own passions--to talk of that which is confessedly less real, which is a fiction. The symbolist leaves the given to find that which is more real." - C.S. Lewis, \textit{The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition}, London, Oxford U. Press, 1936, p. 45.

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was modelled, each synthesis of opposites meant another to begin. No single work could be the artist's last word; Klee's one, unfinished work is comprised of the forms that remain of the over nine thousand visual syntheses he performed. Some such yearning for the infinite, Fichte had said, was the mark of the romantic man of reason who yet was careful not to destroy by ratiocination the powers of the unconscious mind. And F. Schlegel noted that romantic poetry could hover reflectively between what was (re)presented and the (re)presenter, disinterested, intensifying and endlessly multiplying reflection on and of both. Thus Romantic irony might achieve an infinity of images of reality not by extension of the artist's range, but by intensification, by multiplication of many reflections upon even one subject. For the most part, Klee did indeed concentrate on a limited range of Romantic motifs and subjects. Prolific production of small works (note the Romantics' passion for the fragmentary) was another result of this approach and Klee conceived his master work as the one made up of many small works. As early as 1914, he formulated a way of accomplishing a great artistic oeuvre in which, at the same time, child-like spontaneity was preserved.

To invent the chorus mysticus which would have to be

215 Walzel, pp. 42-43.

216 Ibid, p. 11, citing a letter from F. to W. Schlegel; and ibid p. 29, from Fichte's Grundlage der gesamten Wissenschaftslehre (1794), p. 303.

217 Walzel, p. 42, citing F. Schlegel's Athenaeumfragment 116, 1798.

218 For example, Klee produced more pictures of angels than any other twentieth century painter. -Comte, p. 215.

219 Aphorisms or "fragments" were F. Schlegel's favorite literary form, also used by his brother (Walzel 187-88). Novalis too wrote reams of "thought-splinters," "which purposely looked at things from every conceivable antithetical point of view..." comprising the Blutenstaub. (Walzel, p.189)

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performed by a few hundred children’s voices. He who were able to do that would not need to exert himself. The many little works ultimately lead there.220

All representation of reality is necessarily incomplete,221 and time, like Romantic poetry, is always in the process of becoming,222 said F. Schlegel. The idea of continual process—becoming—had also been prominent in the aesthetic of F. Schlegel:

Romantic poetry is a progressive universal poetry: it is still in the process of becoming; that, indeed, is its peculiar nature—that it can only become and never can be completed.223

Many of Klee’s individual pieces seem sketchy, rudimentary; yet he carefully catalogued and ranked each one.224 Seyhan cites an affinity for fragmentary forms of discourse like the essay, letter, diary, etc. as part of the spirit of the German Romantic philosophical and literary tradition.

As elusive modes of representation, allegory, irony, catachresis, metalepsis, and ellipsis find their physical home in the fragment and the arabesque (or the grotesque). ...[The] fragment enacts both interruption and subversion of closure. In narrative form, the fragment resists all claims to truth and...system building...

"...as a fragment, the incomplete appears in its most bearable form."225

On July 8, 1937, when Klee was very ill, Lily Klee

220 Diaries, no. 933, p. 309 (summer 1914).
221 Seyhan, p. 60.
222 Ibid, p. 61.
224 Romanticism did not mean self-abandon, but self-control: cf. Walzel, p. 47.
225 Seyhan, pp. 71-72, paraphrasing F. Schlegel, and quoting Novalis, Schriften.

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wrote to Grohmann: "He stays up until eleven at night, and the drawings fall to the ground one after the other." 226

An infinite number of reflective fragments or images implies an analogous infinity of associations or allusions attached to any one subject studied. For this reason no one work can ever fully represent or reveal its subject. In fact the Romantics affirmed that the infinite was contained in the finite, present in each individual entity. According to Schleiermacher, this meant that poetry has a vastly extended range of subject matter (as well as infinite intensive possibilities for each subject), now embracing the poetic quality of the entire world, 227 the world itself being the supreme work of art. 228 In each image of each subject, then, poetry strove to reveal the infinite, W. Schlegel concluded. 229 Every work of art was symbolic of the infinite. For this reason, too, every image is necessarily inadequate and fails to do justice to the infinity present in the finite subject. The romantic ironist knows this from the beginning. 230 That is the pathos of the artist's endeavor, which he must overcome with irony, by an aesthetic distancing of himself from his own pathetic life, with its eternal disappointed yearning and striving.

The Romantics' never-ending striving, the dynamism, and a cosmic origin of that formative dynamism had been already present in Schelling's natural philosophy. He saw the universe as uncon-

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226 Comte, p. 220.
228 Ibid, p. 72, citing Schelling, 1801.
229 Ibid, p. 72, citing W. Schlegel's Berlin lectures (I,90).
230 Ibid, p. 30, citing a letter of F. to W. Schlegel, 1792; and ibid, p. 43.
scious rational life in the process of generating conscious forms, saw intelligence as a process of becoming, or of coming to itself in triadic movement. Walzel writes of Schelling's theory:

In the development through which it must pass, the isolated incident is regarded not as an end in itself but merely as an inevitable means to an end. The individual in nature is but a passing moment in which the alternating play of forces comes to a halt only immediately to begin again...the basis of all natural processes is not only dualism and polarity but also the synthesis of these antithetical forces. Thus Fichte's triadic rhythm of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis becomes the principle of deduction in natural philosophy.\(^{231}\)

Klee's irony was likewise an art of movement. Indeed, it was Klee's belief that movement was the basic mode of being in the universe, that any stasis on earth was temporary, or illusory.

Character, too, is movement. Only the dead point as such is timeless. In the universe, too, movement is the basic datum... . On this earth, repose is caused by an accidental obstruction in the movement of matter. It is an error to regard such a stoppage as primary.\(^{232}\)

In the same spirit Goethe had had Faust say "Insofar as I am static, I am enslaved."\(^{233}\) Walzel says, and it seems plausible, that it was the desire for utter freedom exemplified in Faust which led to the glorification of the protean, ironic dialectic of German Romanticism: it meant "infinite determinability" by oneself only.\(^{234}\) As I pointed out in ch.2, (pp.18-20 above) I believe it was also Klee's desire for freedom from anxiety which led him to consciously favor this dynamic. Freedom from attachment or commitment to any one entity or hope in life seemed to offer freedom from passions which attach one to other people, in

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\(^{231}\) Ibid, p. 53.

\(^{232}\) Paul Klee, "Creative Credo," p. 185.

\(^{233}\) Walzel, p.24.

\(^{234}\) Ibid, p. 24.

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all their vagaries, to beloved places and to hoped-for events. By all accounts Klee was as impassive as a Buddha, indeed he was called the "Buddha of the Bauhaus" by his students.\textsuperscript{235}

The negativity of Klee's irony

This brings us to aspects of Klee's aesthetic which might give artists pause about adopting him as a source in an artistic tradition. I have shown that Klee's use of romantic irony, so far from destroying "what is lofty and best" as Hegel had feared, became the very idiom in which, through a playing off of nineteenth and twentieth century ideas and forms against each other, he brought into our time and place the aesthetic of the German romantics, which is both lofty in its ambitions and rich in possibilities for visual artists now. But we began with Klee in anxious despair, and choosing irony as an escape from the chaos of passions into which his trauma as an epigone had thrown him. I believe Klee remained essentially pessimistic throughout his life about what his art in particular could accomplish in terms of ultimate, religious or transcendent verities which expressed the hopes of the romantics and of his closest friends, Kandinsky and Marc, as well as himself. This is because Klee's irony canceled his subjective self-importance in its very formulation; (see ch.2, pp.18-20 above) it made him ridiculous to himself even as he posited himself as god of his small world.\textsuperscript{236} It relativized and reduced his passion throughout his life. Here Hegel was

\textsuperscript{235} Glaesemer, Jürgen, "Klee and German Romanticism," MOMA, p.73.

\textsuperscript{236} Just as Todorov points out that what Hegel correctly identified as the Romantic (that is, F. Schlegel's) insistence on the autonomy of the artist is contradicted elsewhere in Schlegel's Athenaeum. "...the first law is that the poet's arbitrariness is subject to no law." -Todorov, p. 195, quoting Athenaeum 116, sentence 13.

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vindicated in his negative judgement on the ironical approach, in the sense that the nugatory power of an ironic attitude towards artistic conventions also fatally relativized for Klee any achievements or normative principles he put forth. Perhaps recognition of this accounts in part for the prodigal size of his art theory, comprising over thirty-three hundred pages which, though endlessly fascinating, never added up as he hoped to the systematic, definitive theory of painting, the counterpart to Fux's *Gradus Ad Parnassum*. Even late in life Klee seems to have felt bitterly that art--at least his own-- achieving nothing of lasting worth. This is how he ambivalently praised the worth of art in an important essay:

One may still speak reasonably of the salutary effects of art. We may say that *fantasy, inspired by instinctual stimuli creates illusory states which somehow encourage or stimulate us more than the familiar natural or known supernatural states, that its symbols bring comfort to the mind, by making it realize that it is not confined to earthly potentialities, however great they may become in the future; that ethical gravity holds sway side by side with impish laughter at doctors and parsons.*

**But, in the long run, even enhanced reality proves inadequate.**

Art plays an unknowing game with ultimate things, and yet achieves them!

Cheer up! *Value such country outings,* which let you have a new point of view for once as well as a change of air...to slough off your earthly skin, to fancy for *a moment that you are God; to look forward to new holidays, when the soul goes to a banquet* in order to nourish its starved nerves, and to fill its languishing blood vessels with new sap.237

(My emphases.) Note that Klee stated that man's unchanged base primal instincts, nothing more, were the motivation in appropriating art's "salutary effects." This seems startling cynical.

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237 Paul Klee, "Creative Credo," p. 186. Tower remarks that in editing "Über Graphik" into "Creative Credo," the final version, Klee changed "zum Tische" to "zur Tafel"—downplaying the altar image in favor of one of a holiday banquet. -Tower, p. 131.

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alongside the utopian, revolutionary hopes of his contemporaries. One is elevated only to "illusory states," and these "country outings" are quickly over. Even the illusory enhanced reality fails Klee. Yet he appears to give himself a shake in the next sentence, as he realizes that in "playing" with art\textsuperscript{238} he had, in fact, broken new ground in painting, and created a communicative, cohesive body of work which successfully embodied his beliefs about "ultimate things" in a new idiom. But in the end he seems to make a resigned gesture towards the people he means to strengthen "for the inevitable return to the greyness of the working day,"\textsuperscript{239} holding out as their best of all hopes the "fancy" that they are God, for a little while.

Clement Greenberg wrote in 1939 that the...

...avant-garde found the abstract because they sought the absolute. The avant-garde poet or artist tries in effect to imitate God by creating something valid solely on its own terms, in the way nature itself is valid, in the way a landscape—not its picture—is aesthetically valid...\textsuperscript{240}

(My emphasis.) This was certainly true, as I have just mentioned,

\textsuperscript{238} Ringbom felt that in a sense Klee also played with critics and viewers: "[Klee] did not dissociate himself from extravagant interpretations of [his theories]....Together with Kandinsky, he thus has to share responsibility for the more recent vogue of attributing mysterious powers of scientific insight to abstract art." -Sixten Ringbom, "Paul Klee and the Inner Truth to Nature," Arts Magazine, (NY) vol. 54, no. 1, September 1979, p. 116. It's certainly true that Klee allowed these expansive interpretations of his works to go unchallenged. See also O.K. Werckmeister, The Making of Paul Klee's Career, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1984. O.K.W. thinks Klee played a much more cynical game with critics and art market, generating art and theory with a bourgeois eye on his bank account. His documentation is impressive and painstaking, but not sufficient to prove this contention, I think.

\textsuperscript{239} Paul Klee, "Creative Credo," p. 186.

\textsuperscript{240} Clement Greenberg, "Avant Garde and Kitsch" [1939], Greenberg, p. 8.

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of the dogmatic, sometimes spiritualist schools of abstract painting in the first half of the twentieth century. We saw that indeed Klee spoke of imitating God in his process. (See ch.3, p.32 above.) Greenberg continues:

But...The very values in the name of which he invokes the absolute are relative values, the values of aesthetics. And so he turns out to be imitating, not God...but the disciplines and processes of art... . This is the genesis of the 'abstract.' In turning his attention away from subject matter of common experience, the...artist turns it in upon the medium of his own craft...

...even Klee...derives [his] chief inspiration from the medium [he] works in. The excitement of [abstract] art seems to lie most of all in its pure preoccupation with the invention and arrangement of spaces, surfaces, shapes, colors, etc., to the exclusion of whatever is not necessarily implicated in these factors... .

I hope I have shown rather that Klee is distinguished from Constructivists and other puristic abstract painters by the fact that as a painter he did not absolutize abstraction, did not absolutize the processes of art, and that his art was not about art itself, but about things in his romantically conceived cosmos. All art forms and styles were relativized; his cosmos was resolved through his ironic, aesthetic ego. We saw in chapter two that in this way Klee faced up to the "anxiety of influence" he felt in the wake of European history. He balanced clashing opposites on the fulcrum of his irony, which he also conceived as an artistic conduit for an unknown transcendent origin--a very romantic strategy applied to modern forms. This irony which relativized even his own artistic achievements was a healthy tonic in an era of absolutist metaphysical claims for art, like those of Mondrian, Van Doesburg, Gabo or Kandinsky, among


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others,²⁴² as Mark Cheetham has pointed out.²⁴³

But if we believe art is important, that it has to do with the spirit of man and that "the spirit breaks down fortresses,"²⁴⁴ we need to find a more positive conduit for that spirit besides this ironized self, while keeping Klee's wholeness of vision, his binding together opposites in complementary relationships. The fundamental problem with Klee's approach is that the solitary ego, as he well knew, is not the center of the universe we share with others. This tiny self is, rather, subject to all contingencies, and cannot serve as an absolute of any kind, cannot be the fulcrum on which to balance and weigh everything against everything else. That this is so is what makes many of his pictures humorous as well as poignant. Klee never made F. Schlegel's turn to Christ.²⁴⁵ With Schlegel I believe that Christ---man and God, finite and infinite in one---is a better fulcrum point upon which to balance the cosmic contradictions through which we have to make our way: the fact that we are always failing and that we are forgiven; the fact that we daily move towards wholeness and that we are told we have already arrived; the ugly facts of the world as we experience it, and the promise that it has already been redeemed.


²⁴⁵ Walzel, pp. 86-102.
Positive aspects of Klee's art

Besides Klee's balancing of contradictions in pictorial balance, his emphasis on artistic process as analogous to natural creation and as a unique way of exploring the world, which we looked at in chapter three, was a very valuable contribution to painting and we need to continue take full advantage of it, as artists have since the nineteen-forties and the Abstract Expressionists. But there was a one-sidedness there, an abandoning of thought of the world and a simple revelling in painting, as Greenberg charged in 1939. Instead of emphasizing either only process without regard for finished work, or imposing a template of pre-cognition over the world before setting to work representing it in the more traditional ways, we may approach the world by means of our craft, and get to know things always freshly, in another aspect, from another point of view. Only in this way can we hope to make a contribution to the ongoing development of new symbols, new ways of seeing, new models of reality and new language for our culture. The hope of doing so presupposes our ongoing interest in the semantic moment in art, in communication as well as expression; in a shared symbolism. At the same time, such purpose entails a commitment to craft, to a finished work, in which the new symbol of achieved imaginative knowledge through that process abides and is preserved, to be modified by the next generation. Klee's creative process is exploration, visual thinking through brush or pencil; it is a search for meanings, for connections and relations between things, for understanding in the world in a medium. On this model, a finished art work, is a dated-and-located, enduring taking of a symbolic position in a world of meaning, which terminates that process for the time being. Thus, interest in process and product complement and reinforce each other.

Klee's forms eventually became so simple that he had to rely
on a combination of title and the freight of collective associations carried by forms like the acute angle of his "walking legs," or the everyday arrow sign. As outlined in chapter four, he often trod a fine line between forms which could be recognized in their context as representing or alluding to reality, and those which would be non-referential forms; yet he always left cues (including allusive titles) by which we could indeed recognize the way, following him farther and farther on, en route acquiring new ways of seeing things symbolically put together. Without such a basic minimum from an artist, there can be nuances of meaning read into the shapes and forms of art as with any object; they can serve us as unwitting prompts to memory or association; but these meanings will be accidental, like those which attend looking at any non-art object, like a cloud or a piece of driftwood. Each of these has its aesthetic aspect, provoking associations in the individual. But this is not communication between artist and individual; it is solitary reverie. What sets an art work apart from the aesthetic object is that it is to some degree intentional in its allusions, that is, viewers will make at least one of the same connections the artist made in contemplating these forms. The allusivity of art, as opposed to other objects, is intentional and therefore communicative.246

As we saw in chapter five, Klee incorporated signs and symbols, forms and techniques from the whole world of fabricated two-dimensional form, including primitive and non-art forms. If we redeem the promises implicit in Klee's broadening of the basis of modern representational art, we may hope to extend the appeal

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246 Calvin Seerveld has proposed allusivity as central defining moment for aesthetics. —C. Seerveld, "Modal Aesthetic Theory," chapter four in Rainbows for a Fallen World, Toronto, Toronto Tuppence Press, 1980, p. 105. An aesthetic of allusivity as norm for art, besides presupposing the skilled formation that pertains to any cultural artefact, presupposes communicability of imagery.

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of allusive/imaginative avant-garde art to those who have been excluded, because we begin with elements and forms familiar to them, before leading with these clues to new symbolic or imaginative knowledge. At the same time we can offer an alternative, poetic art to one of mere syncretistic sampling, "appropriation," "quotation" of art historical sources, and collage. Collage and ready-made art well expressed the breakdown of the meaning-world of modern rational order. Klee did not do much collage because he wanted to find a way to re-integrate rationality into modern art, reflecting the fact that it is an indispensable aspect of human life. He did so by interpreting and transforming elements representing rationality—abstract or geometric forms or styles, and certain signs, as well as elements representing the primitive—primitive forms and motifs—before synthesizing them, rather than collaging them together as he found them. Klee's process-orientation meant a fresh start, maybe a whole new set of forms (or "style") with each new picture, but his ouevre maintained its own kind of order, partially informed by rationality: each picture introduced its own order of problem confronted, medium and process chosen and finished integrated work achieved.

I want to emphasize again Klee's poetic representation as a gift to modern art, one with which few, up until recently, had experimented. As we saw, this means using forms as it were onomatopoeically, in visual analog to the truth we want to tell; letting the shapes and colors and various types of form—including, as needed, abstraction, cartoon, paradigmatic/generic, diagrammatic, "primitive," graphic, "found" forms and so on—change in nuance and in what they allude to and how they do so, according to their context, just as does the sound of the same word used in different poems, in giving orders or in telling a story. Here is the synthesis of new symbols in a process of poetic representation, an alternative to an art of "appropria-
tion" from art historical sources in an ironic way. Klee's broad experience in languages, literature, music, history and the sciences gave him a large historical perspective with which to evaluate the trends around him and choose from among them those which he could reinterpret and deploy in a unique way, not just quote. It also enabled him to find in the history of his own culture the elements he needed to concretize an old musical and literary aesthetic in new visual terms, integrating his formal experiments into a coherent, communicative whole. In so doing he found he was able to bring forward an old tradition in a modern idiom and make a new contribution to the history of culture.

Conclusion: Living in an epigonic age

Fittingly, there were three principal elements in Klee's modus operandi: the German Romantic tradition in which he was rooted and on which he drew for his world view, themes and motifs; the artistic network or community of which he was a member, and whose forms he shared and modified; and his own trained aesthetic ego, which brought together the art of the old tradition and that of the contemporaneous community as in a prism. I will speak of the latter first. It's good that in speaking of Nietzsche's essay "On the use and disadvantage of History for Life," Seerveld approves Nietzsche's recommendation that we need to circumscribe for ourselves a horizon beyond which limit the past must be forgotten, in order to live powerfully now. The epigone is paralyzed by memory because he is reminded he will be lost in the stream of becoming. As human beings, we can empathize with Klee's need to feel the world scaled down to his own size, which he felt to be infinitesimal beside European art history (ch.2, pp.14,16) He tried to draw a circle around himself

\[247\] Cited by Gross on p.1 this chapter, above.

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alone, his own subjectivity. (Ibid, p.19) In a sense he wanted to know nothing of Europe, poets, museums; he wanted to be self-taught (ch.2, pp.18-19, diary entries). One might think, looking at the simplicity of some of his works, that it is remarkable how much outside the circle of his subjectivity Klee seems to have succeeded in forgetting.

But it is an artful simplicity. In fact we have seen how his art did not develop beyond graphic nineteenth century allegory until he did fall in with a community—the Blaue Reiter, in 1912 (ch.3, pp.37ff). They provided his introduction to art of the new century. Through them too he developed a network of dealers, admirers, peers, critics and collectors which steadily expanded throughout his life and beyond. For ten years at the Bauhaus he lived in close community with Kandinsky again as well as stellar Modernists including Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Josef Albers, Oscar Schlemmer, El Lissitzky, Gabo and Pevsner, fresh from the Constructivist avant-garde of revolutionary Russia. He mastered the idioms he learned in and from this protean community, before he used their sophisticated forms and sensibilities—Fauvism, Cubism, Orphism, Constructivism, Dada and Surrealism. He then used them in a manner visually analogous to that of the German Romantic literary tradition, often using the old themes and motifs in his playing. He played them off against the content of his inner life, or against each other, or against primitive or non-art or graphic forms. All this was in the spirit and paradigm of the old romantic irony, organicism and poetic representation.

Here lies the importance of tradition, as Seerveld notes; a tradition for innovative cultural action, a living communal memory, which is not inert but does have a shape. One needs a pou sto and its historical embodiment today, full of memories, if one would be a cultural leader and follower, because culture is a communal activity and everyone is enclosed by temporal process

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somewhere at a certain time.\textsuperscript{248}

In spite of his limitations and his pessimism (and in this too we can take comfort!), using its own method, Klee reincarnated eighteenth and nineteenth century aesthetic theory of irony, organicism and poetic representation, in a playful, ironic visual style which both withholds and gives freely of its allusions, radiating out of modest, deceptively simple symbols. This is not old wine in new skins, but life to the dead. Seerveld speaks of tradition-transmission as a form of translation via which, if the translator is at home in both languages and good,

\begin{quote}
A primary text which was initially confined to its resident language is now in translation given a new hearing, is graciously received not as a refugee but as a guest, a landed immigrant, and turning native, thoroughly at home, \textit{enhances the idiom of the new language}.\textsuperscript{249}
\end{quote}

This is what Klee has accomplished, and we have much to learn from him.

But after 1933, his exile back to Switzerland and the dispersal of the European avant-garde, when he did his most powerful work, he was alone as an artist. And even in community he was always the outsider. He never assimilated either one style exclusively nor any of the various strong spiritual orientations of Kandinsky, Marc, and others. He eventually left the Bauhaus because of his dislike of the meetings and politicking that inevitably beset a small institution of strong personalities. He was and remained quite the private, laconic Swiss-German, making up his own mind, according to his home-styled romantic cast, how to make what he loved of the old be at home in the new world.

In the postmodern environment, many artists have abandoned

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{248} C. Seerveld, unpublished notes for lecture, I.C.S., Jan. 24, 1992.
\item \textsuperscript{249} C. Seerveld, "Footprints in the Snow," \textit{Philosophia Reformata} 56, 1991, p. 29.
\end{itemize}

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the old formal categories and dualisms as false. In some ways, our time much resembles Klee's own epigonic one, with the crushing weight of knowledge of forbears seeming larger than life, whose works are available in great quantities of slides, journals, reproductions, literature and film. Our life and culture is fast and fragmented. Many feel caught amongst forces much larger than the small self. We may feel smaller than ever as population explodes, technology proliferates and transforms our spaces, scientists predict environmental doom. Throughout this paper I have employed modernist terms like art object, style, and the like. But the backdrop against which we make art today has changed since the first half of the century, in certain respects due to Klee's influence. Artists have been set loose from not only style and school but the necessity of producing an enduring art object at all at the end of a given process. The process itself, or a bare idea, documented and illustrated, is often considered "art" in the present context. The art world is no longer divided into several dominant contending doctrines of art in revolution against an older aesthetic. Postmodernism confronts us with multitudes of individual artists--each with a circle drawn around himself, each a god unto himself, as Klee might have wished. But most are not so free as they think. In the absence of a tradition or community in or against which to define oneself, the individual artist tends to grasp a set stock of forms--a style--or else the anti-style, the anaesthetic; to patch styles and historical sources together in a self-conscious pastiche, or abandon form altogether in a reductionist drive down to nothingness.

Klee offers a more positive approach. As Mark Cheetham notes in "Postscript: Klee and Purity,"\(^{250}\) Klee prefigured what may be positive in postmodernism, the "relentless discursiveness" which

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\(^{250}\) Cheetham, pp. 139-152.

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"saves it from transcendence and grants it the ongoing potential for social and political critique." Klee "in no way seeks a stable, Archimedean point beyond the flux;" he believed in no "absolute or universal beyond the creative energies of art itself." Klee was interested in the processes of growth, change and creation; he made the center of his cosmos the dynamic irony of representation. Cheetham compares Klee's aesthetic center to a crystal, suggesting, with explicit reference to Worringer, that Klee saw himself as a crystal, "growing within an inner, privileged medium, the aesthetic... ." Klee's art does not pretend to be absolute or transcendent, after the manner of the absolutist schools like deStijl, Cubism, Abstract Expressionism. Rather, this crystalline art "is different from but contiguous with the other environment imaged by the outer canvas." Such a crystalline art rejects "the purity of abstraction, with its intimations of the end of art" and affirm[s] the critical power of the aesthetic [and also I think, of the art object] by insinuating its author's crystal voice into discourse that tries to legislate silence.

Klee pointed to the transcendent, the cosmic in his art; but he never thought the forms of art could actually bring the absolute down to man. He felt himself earthbound, and vitally rooted in tradition, in a relation of generational analogy with nature and, like nature, he generated form.

We too may point to the transcendent via our art, in showing to be relative all that makes itself absolute on earth. And like Klee, we may count ourselves among those from another province, a

251 Ibid, p. 140.
252 Ibid, p. 149.
253 Ibid, p. 143.
steadier, quieter place, one not involved in old wars and new trends. We may learn from Klee the careful thinker, the provincial Swiss in a world of factions, to rightly divide what we want to keep, even within ourselves, and what needs to be purged or vivified with what is good in God's world. We can learn here the strength and independence of mind to think through what we want to keep of our inheritance, and go beyond this and think what we want to keep of ourselves. Artists need to think for themselves, but also to be part of a community and a tradition. We need too, like Klee, to stand a bit outside the various attractions of art and theory in the world. But we may draw on a cosmic source which we know, not just working in irony against the knowledge of a superior past, but rather looking to a common understanding still to come, a redemption in which what we do as artists will play a part. We need to think too about how we shall keep what we keep of the past and the present within ourselves and the world. We need to evaluate the forms proliferating around us as to which will serve to clothe and transform what we have to pass on, and which would obscure what we have to offer. There is the mastery of craft, concept and form first, then the use of it as we learn to think in a new idiom, for a while. This is the patient apprenticeship Klee practiced, visiting in the ateliers of artists of the most diverse sensibilities. Then it is for us to rise above the single formal approach, and use it, among others, to create new symbols out of what is behind and around us, within our circle, for the benefit of those who come after.
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Paul Klee Foundation, Kunstmuseum, Bern.

TWO MEN MEET: EACH SUPPOSING THE OTHER TO BE OF HIGHER RANK
(ZWEI MANNER EINANDER IN HOHERER STELLUNG VERMUTEND BEGEGNEN SICH)
P93/5 - Etching, 12 x 22.6 cm
Paul Klee Foundation, Kunstmuseum, Bern.
PORTAIT OF MY FATHER
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1906/23 - Drawing in India ink on glass, 32 × 29 cm

WOMAN AND ANIMAL
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Paul Klee Foundation, Kunstmuseum, Bern.
ILLUSTRATION FOR CANCROE, CHAPTER 5
"WHAT CAUSES THIS PHENOMENON?"
PI1994 (A) - Pen and India ink on paper, 13.7 × 22.2 cm

ILLUSTRATION FOR CANCROE, CHAPTER 16
"THEM FOLLOWING THEM AT THEIR BACKSIDES"
PI1994 (A) - Pen and India ink on paper, 12.7 × 23.6 cm
Paul Klee Foundation, Bern, Switzerland

On a Motif from Hammamet

Uffizi, Florencia, Itàlia

1911-15
Oil on cardboard, 40.5 x 35.6 cm
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Tate Museum, London
ARCHITECTURE
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1933/4: King of the sea snails.
Watercolour and oil on muslin on wood. 28 x 43.

HARLEQUINADE, 1912, 84.
Paul Klee, An *Uncanny Moment*, pen drawing, 1912.127, 6⅞ x 7¼".
Paul Klee, *Human Weakness*, pen drawing, 1913.35, 7 x 3⅜".
Paul Klee, *Garden of Passion*, etching, 1913.155, 3 3/4 x 5 3/4".

Paul Klee, *Sketch for the 137th Psalm*, pen drawing, 1913.156, 3 3/4 x 2".
Paul Klee, *Torment*, pen drawing, 1913.187, 4¼ x 3".

Paul Klee, *Flight to the Right, Abstract*, pen drawing, 1913.158, 5⅛ x 4¾".
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1918/19 - Watercolor on paper, 17.3 × 25.6 cm
Paul Klee Foundation, Kunstmuseum, Bern.
Fig. 11. Snowball Match, Drawing by Six Year Old Girl, reproduced by Kerschensteiner, 1905.

Paul Klee, Children as Actors, 1913.
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Paul Klee Foundation, Kunstmuseum, Bern.
SENECIO
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Kunstmuseum, Basel.
Mask of Fear
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Oil on burlap, 39 1/2 x 22 1/2 in.
(100.4 x 57.1 cm)
The Museum of Modern Art, New York
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Paul Klee. 17. Astray (Siebzehn, ir), 1923 / 136. Pen and watercolor on paper, mounted on cardboard, 11¼ in. (22.5 × 28.5 cm). Kunstmuseum Basel

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1940/322 (G 12) - Oil on jute, 46 × 44 cm
Paul Klee Foundation, Kunstmuseum, Bern.
UNTITLED (STILL LIFE)
Posthumous work
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1940 N - Oil on canvas, 100 x 80.5 cm
Private collection, Switzerland.
Portrait of an Acrobat, 1927

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Watercolor over oil transfer drawing and pencil on paper, mounted on cardboard,
19¼ x 12¼ in. (48.7 x 32.2 cm)
Kunstmuseum Bern, Paul Klee Stiftung
APPENDIX II: GROHMANN'S "FAMILIES" of KLEE PICTURES

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APPENDIX II
GROHMANN'S CATEGORIES OR "FAMILIES" OF KLEE'S PICTURES


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19 Bildnis einer schwangeren
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Portrait of a Pregnant
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20 Bern, Matte, industrieller
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21 Im Ostermundigen Steinbruch
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22 Der Vater, zwei Akte (Paul
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23 Bern, der industrielle
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1882 / 90
Watercolor and oil transfer drawing on paper, mounted on cardboard.
20⅞ x 18⅝ in. (53 x 47 cm)
Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh