

# “Exactitude” in the Territories of “Intuition”. Paul Klee at the Bauhaus

Michele Dantini

For Hannah Arendt, who wrote about it in 1948 in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, the Bauhaus directed by Walter Gropius was a unanimous presidium of rationality applied to the transparency of procedures. “The elite”, wrote Arendt, “took anonymity seriously to the point of seriously denying the existence of genius”. And she continued: “all the art theories of the twenties tried desperately to prove that the excellent is the product of skill, craftsmanship, logic and the realization of the potentialities of the material. The mob, and not the elite, was charmed by the ‘radiant power of fame’ and accepted enthusiastically the genius idolatry of the late bourgeois world”. Such a contraposition between elite and mob, between the late-bourgeois world and the revolutionary avant-gardes, between the cult of “genius” and the technical instance of impersonality and reduction is undoubtedly simple and suggestive. It somewhat helps us to understand the “political” fortune of the Bauhaus in

the period after World War II – already initiated, and with full merit, by an exhibition in its own way admirable and decisive, which ensured the continuity, so to say “diasporic,” of the Bauhaus legacy in the United States, entitled *Bauhaus, 1919-1928*, curated by Herbert Beyer, Walter and Ise Gropius at MoMA in 1938 (fig. 1) – when knowledge of the horrors perpetrated by the totalitarian dictatorships spread throughout the world and the school founded and directed for years by Gropius and closed, instead, by the Nazis, became a legitimate symbol of civic responsibility and democratic legality. The contraposition proposed by Arendt, if effective from ideological points of view is, however, scarcely plausible from a historical standpoint, especially if, in the context of the “first” and “second” Bauhaus, (periodization is important! because many things changed, at the Institute, after 1923) we consider the activity of painters such as Klee, Kandinsky and Itten.

Articolo a invito per inquadramento del tema del focus, non sottoposto a revisione anonima, pubblicato con responsabilità della direzione.

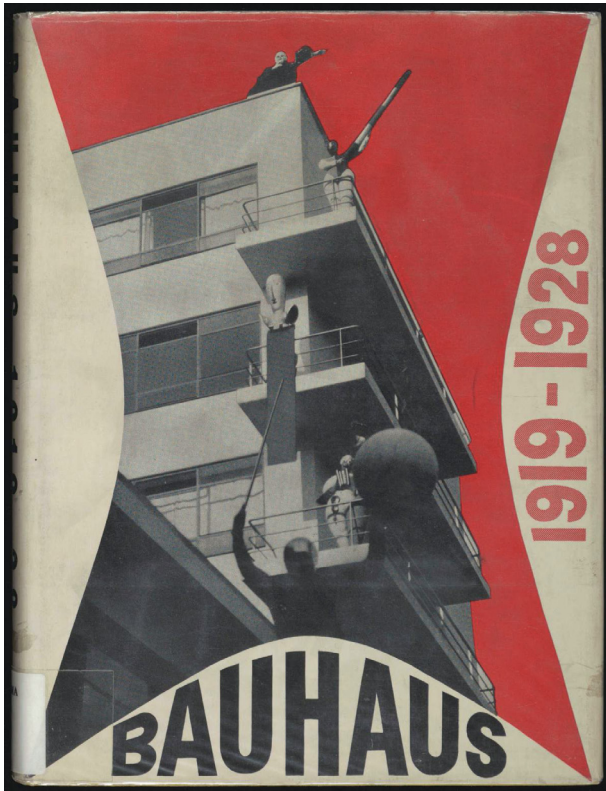


Fig. 1. "Bauhaus, 1919-1928", MoMA, New York, 1938, cover of the catalogue.

### Which Bauhaus? A periodization

We shall start with periodization, then, which to us is useful for making a first clarification; and with the preeminence recognized to artists of "spiritual" tradition –we have just mentioned their names– in the Bauhaus of the origins. Itten has the greatest importance in this institutional and educational context. An expressionist and an expert on oriental religions, Itten showed great interest in the cult of what we might call the "living image". He was responsible for the Preliminary Course, and this means that he welcomed or oriented all the students who enrolled at the Bauhaus. In the catalogue of the New York exhibition *Bauhaus, 1919-1928*, mentioned above, we read that the importance of the Institute rested

"on the courageous acceptance of the machine as an instrument worthy of the artist." This statement may seem surprising, if we consider Itten. An adept of Mazdeism, the ancient Iranian religion of those who profess faith in the teachings of Zoroaster; the Swiss artist strived at that time to propitiate the union between art and magic, aiming to awaken the "cosmic" or astral Self. This is what the "tactile" experimentations with the most different materials proposed to students in his class were intended for. Far from proposing an "abstract" or "materialistic" art, Itten pursued "spiritual" dimensions that had nothing to do with industrial design and the use of the machine. Quite the opposite: they moved from assumptions in many ways to the contrary. In proposing the image of himself (and of the artist in general) as a saint of the new religion, Itten appears to us, in part, an unorthodox and radical pupil of Kandinsky, who would arrive at the Bauhaus after him; and from Kandinsky he drew, in fact, his aversion to the most tumultuous and sensualistic pre-war avant-garde movements, such as the Italian Futurists (propagators of an "aesthetics of the machine") and the Expressionists of *Die Brücke*.

Klee's invitation by Gropius to join the Bauhaus belongs to this hyper-romantic and post-expressionist context, shaped by myths and orientations of religious origin of lesser or greater consistency and sincerity. One spoke, at the time, of "new gnosis". In the later years of war, starting in 1917, Klee benefited from a flattering notoriety in the "cosmic" circles of the Zurich Dada movement, among artist-intellectuals such as Hugo Ball, Hans Arp or Waldemar Jollos, for example, hostile to the war and in favor of a peaceful Europe, scattered, as if for a re-edition of the High Middle Ages, with small working communities of artists-monks, amanuenses and devout artisans. Our current knowledge of Klee, of his authentic works, of the printed texts published during his lifetime or released posthumously, and even more so of the correspondence, only in small part published, certainly does not allow us to portray Klee in the way he is often presented to us by the earliest critics-intellectuals and admirers, that is to say, in subtly promotional or oleographic terms, of the artist-child, of the oriental wise man mysteriously transplanted in Bavaria, of the Mystic reclining on his snow-white daisy. Klee is an artist full of anger and idiosyncrasy, reactive to the historical and social scene, irritable to the highest degree; at the same time able to outline new artistic and cultural scenarios, to temper the bitterness and the "nihilistic" destructiveness of his generation by painting images, in their own way irenic, of sylvan temples, flowers and magical hermits [Dantini 2018]. It was, however, the "cosmic" and initiatic fame, verging on monasticism, appre-

ciated by both Itten and the early Gropius, utopian and “expressionist,” that brought Klee to the Bauhaus (his collaboration with the Institute began in January 1921): a fame that by then had spread throughout German-speaking countries, and was about to extend to Italy as well—thanks to *Valori Plastici*, the journal founded by Mario Broglio to which Carrà, Tavolato and the De Chirico brothers contributed—and which subjugated his first students. Neither Klee nor anyone else at the Bauhaus in that period had anything to object to in the notion of “genius,” despite Arendt’s opinion. Indeed, it was claimed for himself by Klee, who detested the artist-showman, always in search of praise, without intrinsic motivations and his own formal vigor; but he was careful not to throw out, together with the showman’s bath water, the baby of the classic-romantic tradition. “Genius,” therefore, yes, in his eyes, in the sense of rarity and election; and again yes, in the sense of a full right of the artist (who is *Meister* at the Bauhaus, that is, “master” in the Dürerian sense) to the deployment of imagination.

The arrival of Moholy Nagy in 1923 was bound to change things. Not only because of the easy and belligerent charm of the Hungarian-born artist which captured Gropius, but also because of the fact that the Institute was in a serious crisis and the openings to the world of industry and technical design promised to solve at least the most basic economic needs. Moreover, the aeronautical industry had just developed a technique for bending tubular steel that could be usefully employed in the manufacture of furniture; this, too, was an apparently contingent circumstance, but which gave great impetus, with the first projects for chairs and armchairs designed by Marcel Breuer as well as others, to the birth of a “second” Bauhaus.

Between 1923 and 1924, the relationship between the Bauhaus and several painters became stormy. Moholy-Nagy himself insisted on abandoning traditional techniques, destined, in his opinion, to produce a few objects of great cost for the individual luxury goods market; in favor of photography, cinema, architecture, more capable than the former of dealing with the demands of social transformation. Painting, sculpture, individual “charisma,” clairvoyance, “genius”: all this began to create problems, and the consequences were not long in coming. Itten, as we know, left the Bauhaus. For Klee, who in his letters to his wife Lily often wrote of his discomfort at the growing ideologicalization of the Institute’s students and the iconoclasm of the “modernists,” and for Kandinsky, who arrived in 1922, a difficult season was beginning, which saw them operating in the context of the Institute, but in a low-profile and not always recognized position. Lectures or short writings by Klee dating back to the period of the “second” Bauhaus reveal

his anxiety: what really interested the artist, on every occasion, was to defend the need of “intuition” and imagination from practical purposes or rational procedures perceived as too constricting. His attitude was prudent and apologetic: he did not venture into frontal confrontation, instead he cultivated a moderate position in attempting to assimilate what, in Dada/Constructivist or functionalist research on new techniques and materials, could best suit his role of *Meister*, creator of symbols and “constructor” of visual enigmas.

### A scrupulous and detached teacher

We have thus outlined the background against which Klee’s teaching at the Bauhaus appears: we cannot cultivate, in its regard, “systematic” expectations or seek there, as done in the recent past, the luminous dogmatic certainty of early-Renaissance *Books* or *Treatises on Painting*. Klee does not venture into the regions of geometry confident of possessing the keys to Creation, nor does he study Nature with the intention of deciphering the hidden plan of the universe. His ambitions are more restrained, partly mediated by his familiarity with Goethe’s studies of natural science, and partly marked by an almost crepuscular humor; and refer to even contingent needs. The didactic texts, which he himself collected between 1921 and 1922 under the title *Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre* (*Contributions to a Pictorial Theory of Form*) (figs. 2, 3), some of which remain in the state of comments in notebooks or on loose pages, stem from observations and ideas jotted down or memorized in previous years, gone back to and modified several times by the artist during his years of teaching (in the past, all this was referred to as Klee’s *Pädagogischer Nachlass*, or *Pedagogic Estate*). The editorial history of the *Pädagogischer Nachlass* is intricate, marked by vicissitudes [Eggelhöfer 2018]: for the Italian reader, it concludes with the publication of the two volumes of the *Teoria della Forma e della Figurazione* published by Feltrinelli, which reproduce the distortions of the German edition edited by Jürgen Spiller [Klee 1959-1970].

If we consult the *Pädagogischer Nahclass* in its original form, possibly leafing through it online [1], here we find Klee intent, through countless, often very synthetic notes, sketches and “technical” drawings, on clarifying the principles of his activity, often transforming insights dating back to the *Blaue Reiter* years, if not earlier, into “didactics”; which certainly had not originally required to be transformed into rules or axioms. Let’s make this clearer: The interest in the “pathologies” of





Fig. 2. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, cover, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

form refers to the research on the propagation of light and the distortions of outlines dating back to the years of Klee's "post-impressionism", between the first and second decade of the twentieth century. The use of geometry for, shall we say, "metaphysical" purposes, to investigate the intimate constitution of a star or the "genesis" of a flower, refers instead to the Expressionist period and carries an infatuation for ancient German painters, Dürer among them, mediated by a few isolated and in part archaizing figures of Romantics, such as Philipp Otto Runge. The geometrical realm, to whose lesson Klee makes continuous reference (figs. 4-6), provides ideas and compositional germs to combine from time to time and to animate, perhaps, in a figurative sense. Thus the world of colors, on whose reciprocal behavior, on

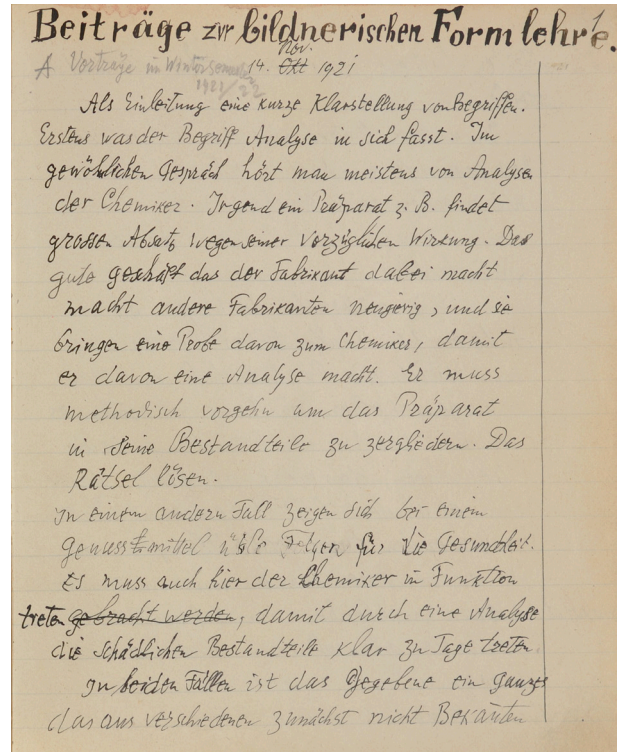


Fig. 3. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, introduction Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

whose rules of attraction and repulsion he does not cease to question himself, almost as though he were looking for a deep "colored bass note," that is, a "mechanics" of states of mind, to use in painting (figs. 7-9). The study of Nature, carried out on the dual levels of botanical and zoological morphology and of the elements (figs. 10, 11), engages Klee in targeted observation on a daily basis, clears the murky fumes of *décadence*—a risk, this, of melancholy, of abatement, of extinction, with which Klee measures himself on several occasions— and, again, provides repertoires from which the creative process can move effortlessly every day [Wind 2007, p. 84 e passim].

In Weimar, the artist was a colleague of motivated teachers, some of whom we have already mentioned. To Itten and

Fig. 4. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

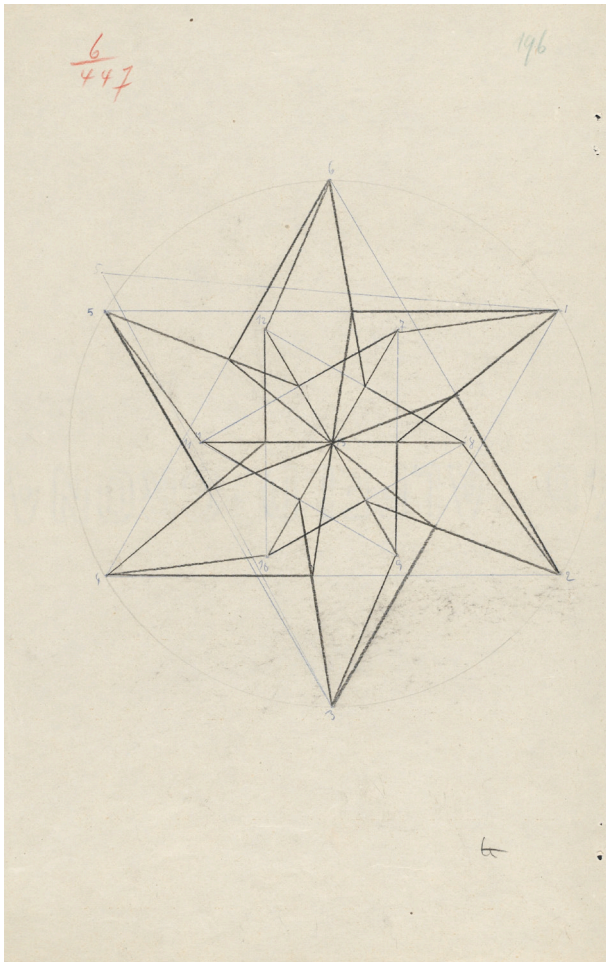


Fig. 5. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

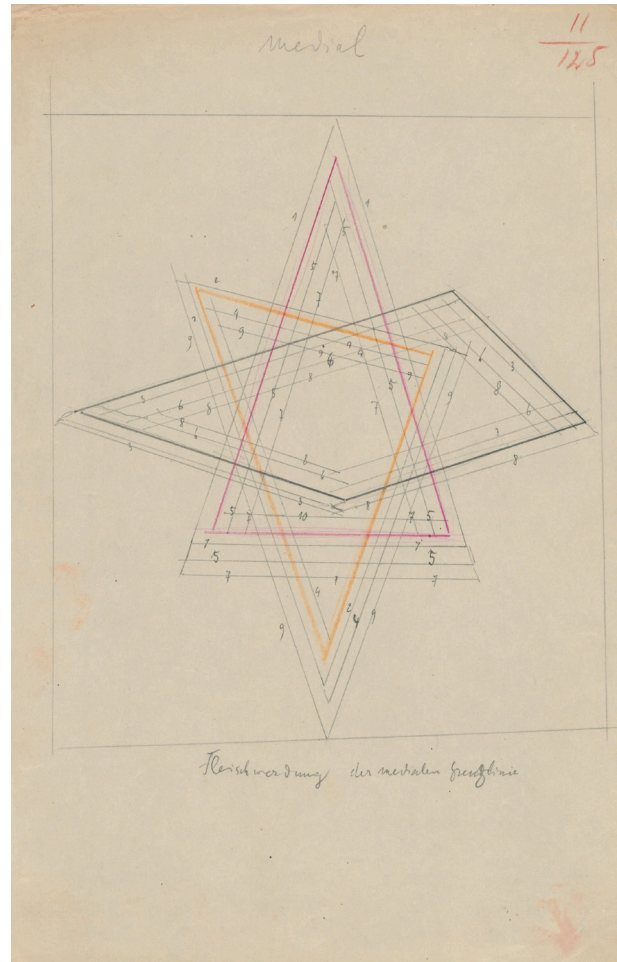
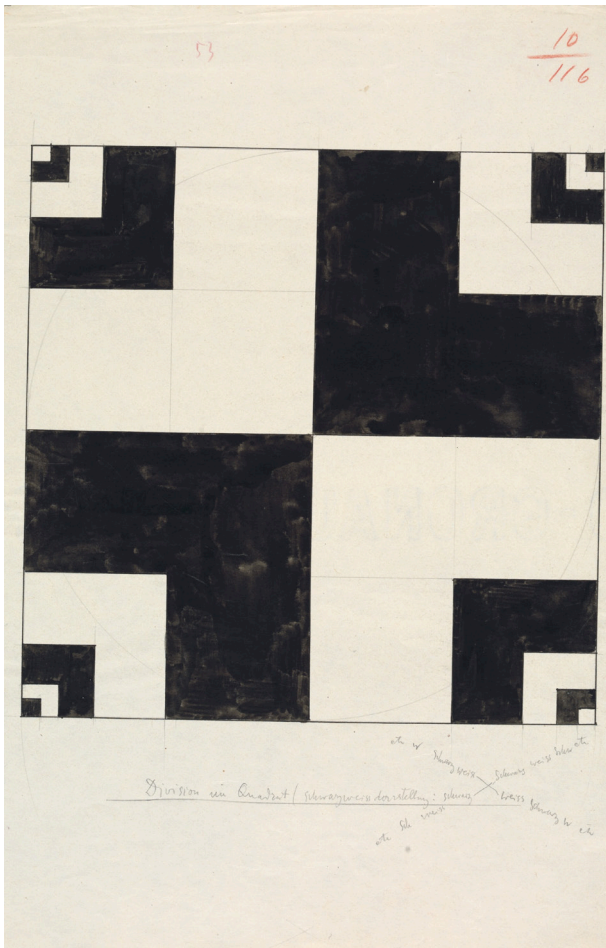




Fig. 6. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.



Moholy-Nagy we now add Oskar Schlemmer: Klee's motives were more subtle. He doubted the public relevance of the *Meister* but approved the project of a community of craftsmen-artists. What's more, the teaching position brought economic security –Klee had only recently come to enjoy a certain celebrity; his income remained unstable– and the differences within the school did not worry him. He wrote to Gropius just after his arrival in Weimar: "I welcome the fact that forces so diversely inspired are working together at our Bauhaus. I approve of the conflict between them if its effect is evident. [...] In general, there is no right or wrong, but the work lives and develops through the play of opposing forces just as in nature good and bad work together productively".

The artist was initially the head of the bookbinding workshop, then of the glass-painting atelier, where he had Josef Albers as his only pupil. His main activity consisted in theoretical teaching intended for students in the first and second semester: Klee gave his lectures by reading *ex cathedra* or led practical exercises held every other Monday. As already mentioned, over the years the Institute's teaching had increasingly taken on a technical and scientific character, to which the painters were forced to adapt. Klee enacted a prolonged, honest dissent. The teacher's dedication was beyond question; his courses, however, were distinguished by the absence of binding stylistic and formal indications: by characteristics that were, essentially, contrary to those considered exemplary in the 1950s and 1960s, when, among Grohmann and Giedion-Welcker; Spiller; Haftmann and Argan, he authoritatively became the systematic theorist of abstraction. "With Klee everything was indefinite" – remembers Gunta Stölzl, a pupil in Weimar; later director of the weaving workshop. "It was possible to draw [from his teaching] as much as one wished." The artist knew he was not lecturing to future expressionists but to industrial designers and adapted his teaching to his audience. It is easy to give examples of this. He left outside the classroom his deep-rooted interest in children's or psychiatric art, of little use in dealing with the theory of form and function, and multiplied the references to Nature, whose study he defined the *conditio sine qua non* of artistic education: sand dunes at the shore, the ribs of a leaf or the geometric structure of the cells of a beehive, he pointed out, are just some of the patterns that can be derived from the observation of organic or anorganic regularities. The way in which he articulated the formal elements of a representation, moreover, or dealt with the problem of the surface –"form," in his eyes, results from the conjunction of motif and "structure," the latter having qualities

of regularity and modularity—reflected his familiarity with the ornamental grammars of Owen Jones, William Morris and Walter Crane. Rarely did he offer free exercises of figuration, such as the inventions or botanical-biological caprices so frequent in his work, but instead alternated extremely elaborate formal analyses with striking and idiosyncratic statements, mostly “cosmic” in tone. Klee was a liberal pedagogue, keen to deny characteristics of universal validity to simple preferences in taste or stylistic conventions prevailing in a given historical period. His respect for the most individual aspects of the creative process was greatly appreciated by his students, who experienced, through him, the possible coexistence of solutions otherwise considered antithetical. “His formulation of problems,”—recalls Helene Nonné-Schmidt, a student from the Dessau period—“often sounded like the formula of a mathematician or physicist, but we considered it pure poetry.” He prepared his lectures carefully, educating young artists to a conscious and controlled use of the primary elements of figuration—line, color, surface—but he feared that the rationalization of intuitive processes would negatively affect creativity. He was concerned with awakening fantasy activity by establishing its primacy over theory and rational procedures. “The picture has no particular purpose”, he warns, in flagrant disagreement with the functionalist guidelines. “It only has the purpose of making us happy. It should be something that preoccupies us, something we wish to see frequently and possess in the end”. In the same period, in his activity, he used pre-industrial materials—glass, steel, Plexiglas—and accentuated the artisanal character of his compositions by manipulating the support—he applied, for example, paper on cardboard or fabric on canvas, often torn. He applied tempera or watercolor over an unpolished plaster primer and often painted over an already finished and rejected painting. In this way he preserved, beneath the final layer of color, a clandestine trace, a *graffito*.

### Geometry, “construction” and mnemonics

The essentiality of “clairvoyance” is characteristically intertwined, in Klee, with the scrupulousness of the artist-scientist, respectful of the specificities of the different procedures. The antithesis between “construction” and “intuition”, between “structural” and “individual” elements (or between geometry and imagination) is formulated in Klee in propaedeutic and never definitive terms. In his view, the spark of the “invention” is produced within a repeatable and controlled process

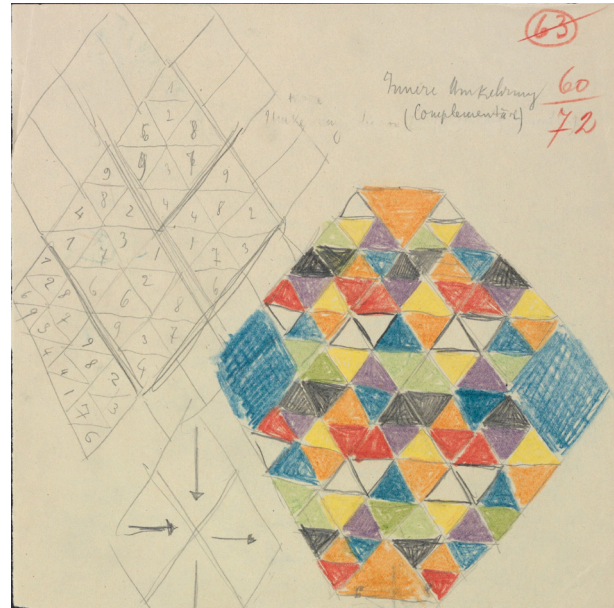


Fig. 7. Paul Klee, “Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre”, 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

of composition (or “figuration”) in almost random circumstances. “In our time worlds are already open or are opening up before us [...] into which it is not possible to enter with one’s eyes alone,” he confided to Lothar Schreyer, who visited him in his studio, late one evening, in Weimar: “You have to do rather like children, savages, the insane. I refer to the realm of the unborn and the dead: the realm of what can and must come, the intermediate realm.” He added, however, as a warning: “imagination is the greatest danger for us all. It is the wrong way, the fatal way for the so-called artists [...] for those who lack an inner reality and must thus employ, more or less consciously, illusion” [Schreyer 1956, p. 170].

It is worth dwelling on a single point. For Klee, it was the simplicity of the primary elements of “figuration” to distinguish contemporary art from art of the classical-Renaissance tradition. Here we are talking about a deliberate simplicity, certainly not a simplification attributable to external circumstances: we are talking about the refusal of imitative techniques. For the artist, however, it was not a question of abolishing figurative “illusion” *tout court* (to arrive at “ab-



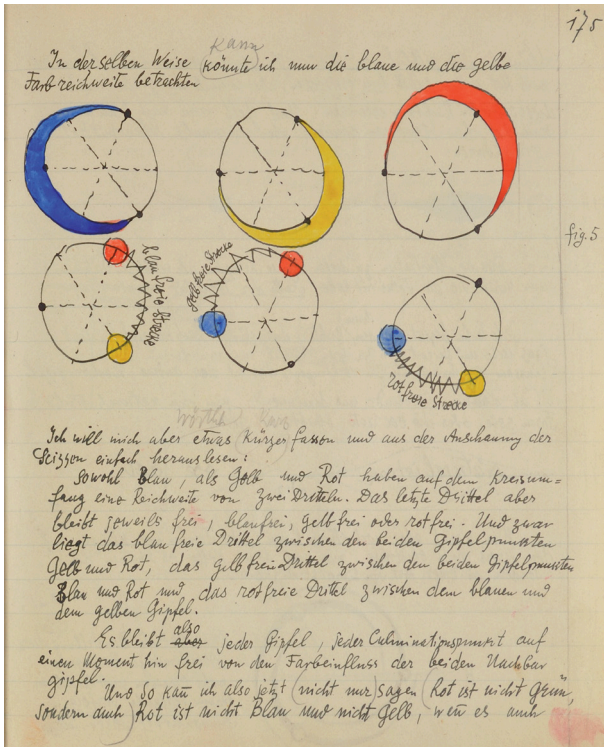


Fig. 8. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

stract" painting or sculpture) but of intimately joining illusion and the unmasking of illusion in every work. In other words: for Klee it was necessary to arrive at the "figure" with only the fundamental plastic elements—with reference to the picture: lines, surfaces, colors—without ever breaking away from the grammar of the plane or the surface. In *Exakte Versuche im Bereich der Kunst* (*Exact Experiments in the Realm of Art*, 1928), he exclaimed, "We should have to give assignments such as: construction of the secret. *Sancta ratio chaotic!*" During his lectures he often explained how, in him, fantasy activity followed (and did not precede!) the "compositional mechanics": that is, it was a precipitate. We understand that Klee was not far from conceiving the "construction" itself in terms of mnemonics: a technique therefore of "invention" by association and "projection." A more or less regular trac-

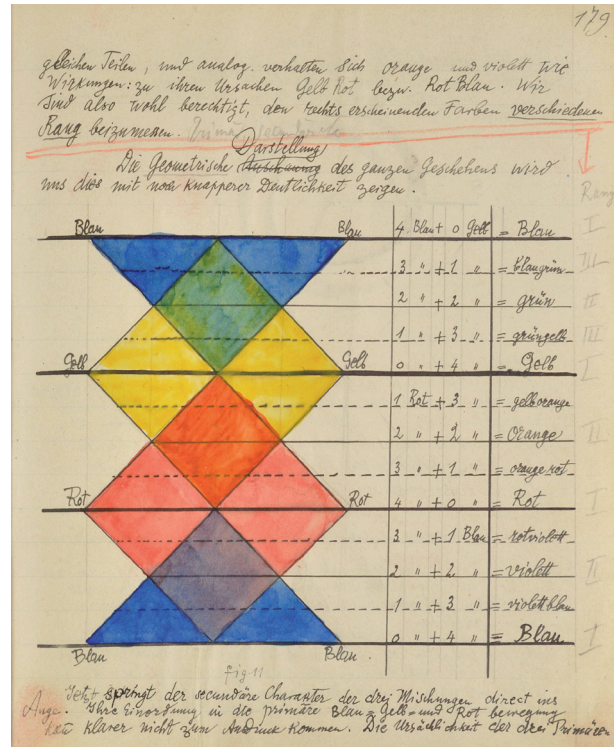


Fig. 9. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

ing of lines or the simple play of muted shades can act as a stimulant, awaken ghosts that have been waiting for ages in our imagination and bring forth "figures" (or if you prefer, favor "visitations") at first unforeseen [2]. To achieve the "figure" with only the fundamental plastic elements, as we said earlier. However, this expedient—or maxim or principle, if you prefer—restrictive in itself, allows a humorous variation that Klee developed with great inventiveness. That is, from his point of view, free "figuration" is allowed as long as the "models" used in the secret of his atelier are revealed. Here I am using a technical meaning of the term "models" and I am referring to those "models," recognizably artificial, on which artists traditionally rely when painting a picture or modeling a sculpture, in the absence of (or in substitution for) "flesh and bone" models: wood-



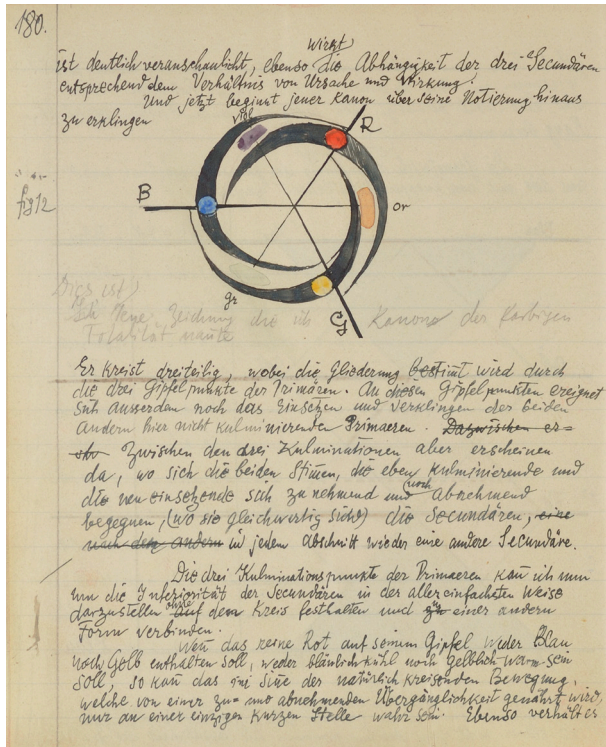


Fig. 10. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

en or wax mannequins, for example, but also prototypes made of paper, wire, fabric or other materials – of people, animals, houses, plants, trees, clouds, etc. Over the course of the 1920s, Klee displayed a wide array of alternative "models," often referring, in doing so, to forgotten segments of Western art history or to techniques considered "minor". In the rough draft of an essay written between 1923 and 1924, he himself compared the artist to a magician capable of evocations and spells (it is to a "magician", after all, that he was compared by the critic and author Wilhelm Hausenstein, one of the first to "discover" Klee and to launch his art in a "mystical" key in the immediate post-war period). The comparison between artist and magician, presumably suggested to him by his knowledge of Picasso and Braque's collages and, even more so, of their small assemblages in

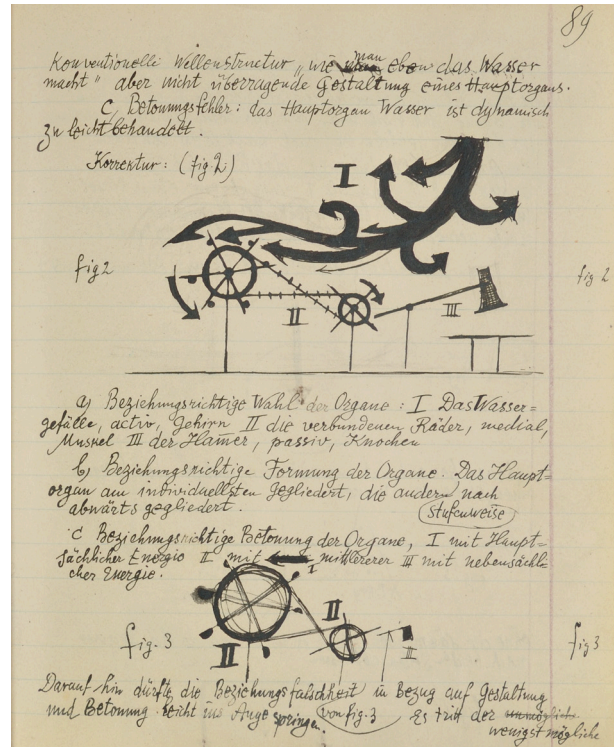
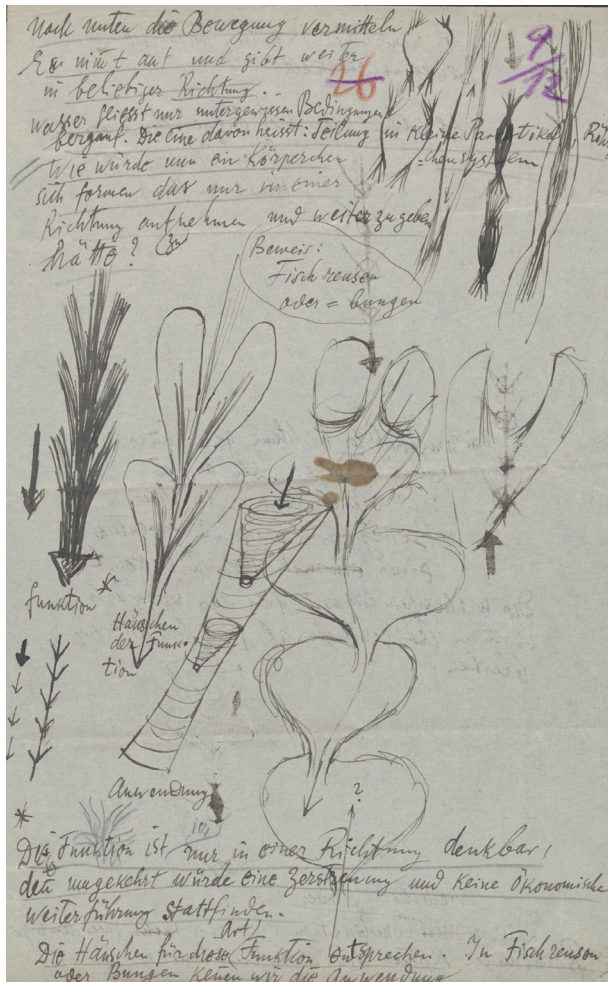


Fig. 11. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.

paper and other materials [3], is pertinent, even if referred to his own activity. With a few simple everyday materials and a fertile imagination, "illusion" is awakened, that is, effects of animation are created. Moreover, by way of greater force and bizarreness, the contemporary magician (and bricoleur) agrees to make the artifice transparent [4]. The previously mentioned *Exakte Versuche im Bereich der Kunst* is the essay to which Klee's fortune as a "theorist of abstract art" is linked: we can consider it the artist's greatest contribution to rationalism between the two World Wars. It appeared in the Bauhaus journal when the Institute, violently opposed by the right-wing opposition, had left Weimar and Thuringia to move to Dessau, at the invitation of a more hospitable social-democratic administration: a calm tone prevailed there, almost a proposal for conciliation. Klee

Fig. 12. Paul Klee, "Beiträge zur bildnerischen Formlehre", 1921-1922, didactic drawing, Zentrum Paul Klee, Berna.



attenuated the previously established contrast between "intuition" and "construction," leaning towards a balanced composition of the two. He allowed himself only sporadic moments of irritation, declaring "We construct and construct, and yet intuition still has its uses". In the same period, in his figurative activity, there emerged a growing attention to architectural design and technical-industrial design considered both as specific figurative genres. However, the terms of the relationship between art and "project" need to be better defined: in the eyes of the artist there was no equivalence. Let us consider for example *Denkmäler bei G.* ("Monuments at G.[iza]", 1929, 93), today conserved at the Metropolitan Museum in New York: executed in watercolor on his return from his trip to Egypt, this composition shows how Klee's adherence to "rational" aesthetics – even in the Dessau years– was contingent and paradoxical.

Between December and January, the artist visited Cairo, Luxor and Aswan and made excursions to Giza and Karnak, in the Valley of the Kings. The atmosphere was fascinating, the beauty of the landscape prevailed over the disillusion caused by the nascent mass tourism – "[in Egypt] tourists of all nationalities meet," he wrote to Lily, who remained in Bern. Then he added, with an annoyance that we would later learn to define as "Frankfurtese": "unfortunately [you meet] Americans too, the only ones who don't know how to behave". Again traveling by sea, enthralled by the elements, he asked himself: "what is the whole of history [...] compared to this water, this sky, this light!" He studied the landscape from a geological, ethnographic and anthropological point of view. He was amazed that only "animals and servants [...]" as in the days of the pharaohs "worked and he carefully observed the ancient irrigation techniques. On the morning of December 26, 1928, he finally visited Giza and its famous pyramids. "They are located on relatively high ground. The air is extraordinarily healthy", he noted, with sober topographical-hygienic considerations typical of a rationalist architect. At the end of the trip, back in Germany, he painted four small watercolors with linear motifs worthy of a *peintre-voyageur*, then two of his most famous compositions, *Denkmäler bei G.* and *Hauptweg und Nebenwege* ("Main Street and Side Streets", 1929, 90), the latter dear to the musician Pierre Boulez.

Considered in "grammatical" terms, the view of Giza is a geometric composition. Klee makes use of the fundamental elements of figuration –line, surface, color– without ever detaching himself from the plane of representation and limits his range of colors to only five shades, the same that characterize the observed landscape: reddish-brown, green, yellow, ochre,

orange. Horizontal stripes running at almost identical distances cover the entire surface of the painting, divided into color modules, and generate "structure". The diagonal lines, on the other hand, produce discontinuity, that is "figures": they break the flow of the horizontal lines and outline the pyramids in a simple frontal view, like a silhouette. Scattered hints of vegetation visible along the lower edge are the only mimetic features of a composition that seems to show purity of construction and extraneousness to nature. With reference to the "static-dynamic" composition of the painting, what has already been established for the "cosmic" watercolors of 1922-23 is again valid here: Klee arranged the sequence of tones so as to produce effects of movement from the bottom upwards and to "dramatize" the view as a context of history and religion. In magically animating itself, *Denkmäler bei G.* offers movement and variation combined with the greatest regularity, with that "economy" of figurative means highly appreciated by the artist. At the same time, the temporal aspect of the painting, which reproduces within itself the sunrise and sunset on vertical planes, opens the "construction" to unexpected mythical-symbolic resonances [6].

Shortly before his trip to Egypt, Klee reflected on the possibilities of producing "wonder" in painting without resorting to chimerical motifs or literary tradition, exclusively through "optics." "Marvelous optical effects" –he noted in his pocket diary, mindful of the Cézannian passage technique– "result from the interruption of form due to the atmosphere." Favorable

professional circumstances were not unrelated to this reflection. In November of 1925 he was invited to exhibit with the Surrealists at the first exhibition of the movement headed by André Breton at the Galerie Pierre in Paris, and his own work, from that date, entered into an artistic-cultural constellation established around proposals of "le merveilleux," the marvelous – the term is Breton's. Klee willingly welcomed the surrealist acclamation. However, he feared that the new figurative trends gave too much credit to the illustrative aspects of paintings. It was here that his search for the "marvelous" took optical-perceptive paths, in other words, physical; without conceding anything to the rhetoric of the "unconscious," of dreams or of "automatism." Was this an elegant way for Klee to belittle Parisian "fashions" and to reaffirm his own North-European identity, oriented towards the severity of geometric "construction"? It is reasonable to assume so. *Denkmäler bei G.* amazes thanks to simple compositional devices. First of all, the bird's eye view, which persuades the eye to follow, in its progressive perception, the movement of the sun. Secondly, "the interruption of contours," which causes the pyramids to open to the "atmospheric element." Thus it occurs that, by effect of "light" co-opted as a "structural" principle, the millenary constructions vibrate, distinct and weightless, against the background of the desert, similar to modern (Taut-Scheerbartian) crystal architectures; and the regularity of the composition, far from closing in on itself, takes on the unexpected semblances of an enigma, of an initiation.

## Notes

[1] <http://www.kleegestaltungslehre.zpk.org/ee/ZPK/Archiv/2011/01/25/00001/> (accessed 2020, 10 May).

[2] This is also suggested by Wilhelm Hausenstein, for whom Kleeian drawing is "reminiscent": Hausenstein 1921, p. 118.

[3] An immediate reference, for Klee, are presumably the sculptures in paper, newspaper, tinfoil, wood, wire mesh that Picasso created between 1912 and 1913, reproduced by Apollinaire in *Les Soirées de Paris* on 18 November 1913; and perhaps also the still lifes in painted wood and strips of fabric, also Picasso's, from the early months of 1914.

[4] In *Arte e Illusione (Art and Illusion)*, a book that takes Klee as a constant reference, Gombrich comments: "the true miracle of the language of art is not that it allows the artist to create the illusion of reality. In the hands of a great master the image becomes transparent. Teaching us to see the visible world with new eyes, he gives us the illusion of looking into the invisible realms of the mind, if only we know, as Philostratus says, how to use our eyes": Gombrich 1965, p. 473.

[5] <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/483171> (accessed 2020, 10 May).

[6] From the painting It is not clear if we are in the presence of a sunrise or a sunset. It is possible that Klee wanted to create precisely this ambiguity. In *Vom kosmogonischen Eros (Of Cosmogonic Eros)* Klages compares the condition of the initiate to the "Dionysian intoxication" described by Nietzsche in the *Birth of Tragedy*. In doing so, he evokes the "contemporary voluptuousness of rising and setting, so voluptuous that death becomes a transformation both painful and happy [...]. In the moment of eternity that the perfection of the erotic-cosmogonic experience unlocks, there is dionysian delirium or crystalline rapture". The reference to Klages' text also seems to explain the visual metaphor (or model) that Klee refers to in *Denkmäler bei G. (Monuments at G.)*, created as an imitation of an electromagnetic field or floodgate device. "Eros is called cosmogonic or cosmic or elementary –writes Klages– because those who are seized by it feel themselves as if crossed by vibrations and flooded by an electric current which, similar in essence to magnetism [...] transforms the very means of every activity, the space and time that separate bodies, into the omnipresent element of an Ocean that supports and surrounds them with its waters: and thus joins, without harm for their irreducible diversity, the *poles of the world*": Klages 2012, p. 51; with modifications.



## Author

Michele Dantini, Perugia Foreigners' University, Department of Human and Social Sciences, michele.dantini@unistrapg.it

## Reference List

Dantini, M. (2018). Paul Klee e il "Nulla", 1916-1923. Epoca, "origine", «stile». In M. Dantini, R. Resch (a cura di). *Paul Klee. Alle origini dell'arte*, catalogo della mostra al MUDEC di Milano dal 30.10.2018 al 3.3.2019, pp. 17-38. Milano: Sole 24Ore Cultura.

Eggelhöfer, F. (2018). L'insegnamento di Paul Klee al Bauhaus: «buona cosa è dare forma. Cattiva cosa è forma». In M. Dantini, R. Resch (a cura di). *Paul Klee. Alle origini dell'arte*, catalogo della mostra al MUDEC di Milano dal 30.10.2018 al 3.3.2019, pp. 62-63. Milano: Sole 24Ore Cultura.

Gombrich, E. (1965). *Arte e illusione*. Torino: Einaudi (prima ed. 1959).

Hausenstein, W. (1921). *Kairuan ode die Geschichte vom Maler Paul Klee*. München: Wolff.

Klages, L. (2012). *Dell'eros cosmogonico*. Milano: Pgreco (Prima ed. 1922).

Klee, P. (1959-1970). *Teoria della forma e della figurazione*. Milano: Feltrinelli (vol. I, 1959; vol. II, 1970).

Schreyer, L. (1956). *Erinnerungen an Sturm und Bauhaus*. München: Langen|Müller.

Wind, E. (2007). *Arte e anarchia*. Milano: Adelphi (Prima ed. 1963).