

Paul Klee's PICTORIAL WRITING

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The Rhetoric of Visual Narrative

Klee's sustained engagement with narrative over his lifetime would seem to be at odds with a professed commitment to the modernist agenda. The legacy of modernism's bias against story telling was summed up by Walter Benjamin when he observed that "there is embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed."¹ Any expressed nostalgia for pictorial narratives would have elicited the same degree of discomfort in the Cubist, Dadaist, and Surrealist circles where the defining characteristics of modernism in the visual arts took shape. In public statements such as "Creative Credo," Klee declared his allegiance to modernism even as he was perpetuating the stubbornly persistent narrative tradition in his visual practice. That he was neither embarrassed nor apologetic about this apparent paradox could indicate a pragmatic decision to ignore it – or, more likely, a considered effort to rethink the role of narrative in contemporary art. An analysis of pertinent examples of Klee's work will show how he reinterpreted the narrative tradition by integrating elements of the spatial and temporal arts, and by using line as a rhetorical device independent of its descriptive function.

Klee was a voracious reader whose understanding of narrative writing was grounded in a comprehensive knowledge of literary history. Judging from the contents of his library, the titles cited in his *Diaries* and letters, and the narrative situations referred to in his drawings and paintings, his literary tastes were eclectic but firmly rooted in the canon of western literature. In his own works Klee interpreted a range of narrative genres, from the epic poem to the modern novel, and any number of narrative voices, with a pronounced proclivity for the ironic. Titles such as *Hoffmannesque Scene* (1921/123) and *Scene in the Style of Strindberg* (1931/75/M15) and their

corresponding images point to Klee's interest in the *how* as well as the *what* of narrative construction. If there is one point of agreement among narrative theorists across disciplines, it is that all narratives consist of what is told (the story or content) and how the story is told (the discourse or form). Although Klee gave equal weight to these two components, the uniqueness of his visual narratives lies for the most part in his innovations in the domain of what he called "pictorial discourse."²

Any effort to characterize Klee's complex visual narratives must begin with the recognition that he applied no single narrative formula. His book illustrations and other visual narratives are unlike the "anti-narratives" of Max Beckmann and the "non-narratives" of Balthus that James Elkins has cited as evidence of modern narrative in its initial stages of self-erasure.³ Nor do Klee's narratives fit neatly into any of the schemata developed by literary theorists. Even those images that might seem to conform to the conventions of straightforward pictorial illustration skirt or subvert these conventions in various ways. Klee's two sets of published book illustrations correspond to aspects of the literary narratives they visually paraphrase, but his pictorial retelling was in both cases so transformative that the images in effect constitute new texts.⁴ The series of images he called his *Opus I* and *The Infernal Park*, which respectively bracket the beginning and end of his professional practice, are multi-image visual texts that depend neither on an imitative relationship between literary and visual imagery for their meaning, nor on chronological order or episodic continuity for their structural coherency. These nonlinear visual narratives share at least one feature in common with the books containing Klee's illustrations: they are doubly coded, being both representational and discursive,⁵ and thus challenge the distinctions between visual and verbal modes of expression so famously articulated in Aristotle's *Poetics*.

Whether they illustrate an accompanying text or are independent of any single literary source, Klee's visual narratives are all multileveled, always elaborating on their own process of production. As such, they can be read as subtexts of a more expansive visual narrative that had parallels in the modern "process novel."⁶ Like many writers working contemporaneously, Klee identified his ongoing artistic production with a process of becoming.⁷ His preoccupation with process is evident in all his writings, which range from the epistolary and the pedagogical to the poetic. Similarly, every pictorial image he produced was on one level a visual record of its own making. An examination of selected works characterized by a narrative modality will introduce Klee's narrative of process and clarify the relationship between rhetoric and content in his visual narratives.

OPUS I

Between 1903 and 1905 Klee produced eleven etchings, which he catalogued together under the subtitle *Inventions*.⁸ In using a term calculated to carry the meaning of the Italian *inventione*, Klee signaled his readiness to test his imagination, which at that point was well fed by observation of both nature and art. His subtitle also aptly characterized an inventive stylistic synthesis for which he coined the adjective “Gothic-classical.”⁹ This compound modifier succinctly brings together Klee’s northern artistic heritage with a program of immersion in the classical tradition undertaken during his Italian *Wanderjahr*, thus encompassing the range of influences and ideas with which he grappled in his formative years. The literary and visual sources of these ideas converge in the *Inventions*. Klee himself alluded to some of his myriad classical sources, pairing the first version of *The Comedian* (Invention 4, 1904/10) with Aristophanes’ comedies, and describing the *Aged Phoenix* (Invention 9, 1905/36) as a Homeric simile.¹⁰ Among the many possible Gothic prototypes for the figures in *Two Gentlemen Bowing to One Another, Each Supposing the Other To Be in a Higher Position* (Invention 6, 1903/5) [Figure 6] are the skeletal partners in late medieval representations of the Dance of Death.¹¹ In addition to providing a key to the range of sources for the *Inventions*, Klee’s Gothic-classical polarity invites the viewer to consider the group of eleven *Inventions* as an initial manifestation of the interplay of polar opposites that would continue to inform the artist’s evolving aesthetic system.

Another manifestation of reconcilable contradiction is implicit in the numerical sequence imposed on what appear to be nonsequential visual images. Each *Invention* is numbered as well as titled. The assigned numbers, which in most cases are etched into the plates, do not indicate the order in which the etchings were completed, nor do they correspond to any readily apparent causal or chronological sequence. Instead, the numbers impose an external structure on what Klee evidently perceived as an internal semantic order. The *Inventions* are linked by this numerically imposed order, as well as by commonalities of style, composition, and thematic content. Despite disparities of size and scale, they hold up under scrutiny as an ensemble, even if not originally conceived as such.

References to the etched *Inventions* are scattered throughout Klee’s *Diaries* and letters from 1902 to 1905. Klee pieced these sporadic references together in 1920 when he drafted an autobiographical statement for the



6. Paul Klee, *Two Gentlemen Bowing to One Another, Each Supposing the Other to Be in a Higher Position* (Invention 6, 1903/5), etching, 11.8 × 20.7 cm. Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (Photograph by Robert E. Mates. © The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation, New York).

author of a monograph on his work. The text prepared for Leopold Zahn consists of excerpts from *Diaries*, amplified with additional commentary and arranged such that Klee could convincingly present the Inventions as his cohesive Opus I.¹² The term opus, often applied to musical compositions and occasionally to literary works, was an odd choice for a relatively modest group of eleven visual images. The simplest explanation for Klee's choice of terminology is the obvious parallel between his numbered Inventions and the numerical system used in cataloguing music. By extension, it can be argued that in appropriating a term traditionally reserved for music and literature, Klee intended to construct a conceptual framework in which disparate images could be read as component parts of a visual whole that is experienced and comprehended over time. In this regard his Opus I is not unlike examples of Max Klinger's print cycles. References in Klee's letters leave no doubt that he was familiar with Klinger's numbered titles, which do not necessarily indicate a chronological order, and his preference for narratives that do not illustrate specific literary texts.¹³ In staunchly denying Klinger's influence, Klee may have been protesting too much. There is always the possibility, however, that parallels between his Inventions and Klinger's prints might have resulted from a common model in Rudolphe Töpffer's "picture-stories."

Töpffer (1799–1846) was a Swiss caricaturist, writer, and pedagogue from whom Klee inherited a penchant for satire and a facile command of the language of physiognomy.¹⁴ The best known of Töpffer's picture-stories is the *Histoire de Monsieur Crépin*, in which Klee would have found a prototype for the poses of the two figures in *Two Gentlemen Bowing* (Invention 6). In Töpffer's 1845 "Essay on Physiognomy," he set out the special advantages of the picture-story over literature or "literature-in-pictures," citing in particular the lively appeal of visual images and the unique capacity of line drawings to communicate meaning with clarity and conciseness.¹⁵ Like Töpffer's picture-stories, Klee's Inventions substitute indeterminate yet richly expressive visual symbols for the wealth of descriptive detail found in literary word painting, or in the pictorial narratives of William Hogarth and other artists who had perfected the skill of narrating stories in pictures. Klee departed from Töpffer's models in substituting pithy titles for accompanying textual legends and in eliminating any indication of a chronological sequence. Most significantly, Klee eschewed Töpffer's popularized social satires in favor of what he called "a satire in the grand style."¹⁶ In all of these respects his Opus I perpetuates a tradition of visual narrative initiated by Jacques Callot's *Caprices*, and continued in graphic cycles of the same title by Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and Francisco de Goya.

In 1905, as he was completing the etchings that constitute his Opus I, Klee announced that he intended to "turn [his] eyes toward Spain where Goyas grow."¹⁷ In fact, the previous year he had already had the opportunity to study Goya's graphic works in the Munich Kupferstichkabinett.¹⁸ If not immediately, at least in retrospect, Klee would have recognized in Goya's *Caprices* an antecedent to his Opus I. Like Goya's *Caprices*, Klee's Inventions are self-contained tableaux, each depicting types and incidents that collectively constitute a nonlinear narrative. In visual terms, such narratives are as structurally expandable as Honoré de Balzac's *Human Comedy* and thematically no less grand and sweeping. The individual Inventions that make up Klee's Opus I are interdependent but not chronologically sequential, a relationship that is reinforced by the fact that the images are not presented in a bound codex. Just as a loose-leaf arrangement obviates a strict temporal sequence, unspecified spatial settings allow the viewer to place the images in any number of cultural and historical contexts. Because Klee's visual narrative is not bound by restrictions of time or place, and is both structurally and thematically open-ended, it engages the viewer in the ongoing production of a constantly changing narrative of human aspirations and limitations.

A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT

Although Klee considered the unconventional Opus I his most technically accomplished and original work to date, he conceded in a letter to his fiancée Lily Stumpf that his reach had exceeded his grasp when it came to expressing complex poetic ideas in purely visual terms.¹⁹ Scaling back his ambitions, he then tried his hand at illustrating a narrative poem by his friend Hans Bloesch. This represented an about-face for Klee, who in 1901 had brashly declared that that he would stoop to churning out illustrations only as a last resort for earning income.²⁰ Once he embarked on the collaboration with Bloesch in 1908, he modified his position, admitting that “the question occurred to me whether I too might not illustrate a beautiful book someday??”²¹ Klee’s change of mind was no doubt influenced by his personal and professional relationship with Bloesch. In 1900 he had contributed a cover drawing of a head in profile to *Bunte Blätter*, a volume of verses by Bloesch and five other aspiring writers. When Bloesch undertook editorial duties for the *Berner Fremdenblatt* from 1903 until 1906, he engaged Klee to write theater and concert reviews.²² Despite this promising beginning, their next cooperative venture did not progress beyond the planning stages.

Bloesch’s “Der Musterbürger” was never published during his lifetime, although copies are available in various forms.²³ Structured according to a calendrical model, it begins with a sonnet entitled “Neujahr” and proceeds with rhymed quatrains grouped into sections corresponding to the months of the year. Klee’s illustrations to “Der Musterbürger” are as tentative and ultimately unsuccessful as the poem itself – an assessment he must have shared since he did not accord the drawings numbers in his oeuvre catalogue. The failure of the drawings as a series of illustrations to a single text lies for the most part in a lack of stylistic unity. Paradoxically, this very absence of consistency within the ensemble is what makes the individual drawings useful as visual documents of Klee’s early experiments with the illustrative potential of various forms of graphic expression. In some drawings forms are rendered with broken, sketchy strokes, in others with densely concentrated marks, while still others anticipate the nervous scrawls of Klee’s illustrations to *Candide*. The elongated figure types in Klee’s illustration of a passage on page thirty-two of Bloesch’s poem (1908) [Figure 7] also look ahead to the *Candide* drawings. The word SÄNGERBUND identifies the figures as members of a choral group, thus explaining the notes projecting from their open mouths. Emblazoned on a banner that ripples across the



7. Paul Klee, *Choral Group* (1908), pen on paper, 16,5 × 24 cm. Private collection, Switzerland (Photograph courtesy of the Paul Klee Foundation).

lower quarter of the page, the quotation from Bloesch's text is contained within its own frame and occupies proportionately less space than the image. Here, as in the other illustrations, Klee was attempting to forge a dynamic spatial relationship between word and image, but the relationship does not rise above a conventional correspondence between a drawing and its title.

Over the years Klee would continue to explore the various ways that visual images relate to verbal texts and vice versa, but at least one issue relating to illustration was resolved once and for all with the "Musterbürger" drawings. Illustrating two lines from page twenty-six that refer to state-subsidized housing for pensioners, Klee initially placed a single figure in front of Switzerland's House of Parliament, identified as such by its distinctive cupola-topped facade with a Swiss flag flying from the central tower. He subsequently crossed through the architectural setting, marking it VOID, and eliminated it altogether in a second drawing to the same passage. Although entirely appropriate to the satirical tone of Bloesch's poem, the specificity of the setting introduced an external referent, thus limiting the potential meaning of the illustration. By avoiding specificity of place in his later

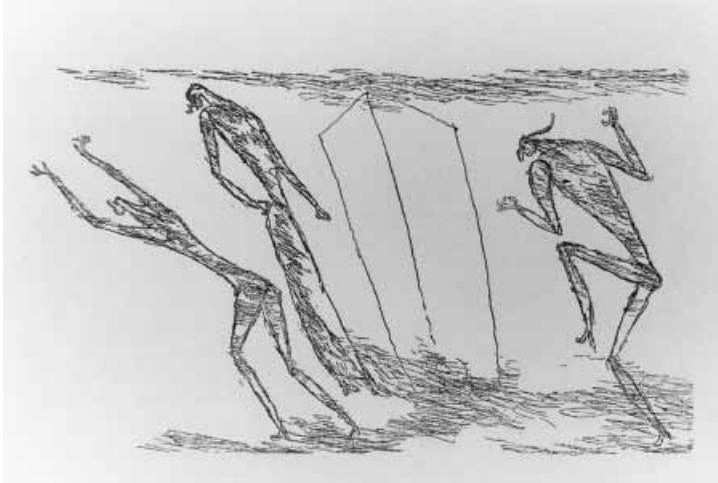
illustrations, as he had earlier in his Opus I, Klee would create an opening between textual sources and visual images that allows the reader/viewer to participate in the fluid, ongoing process of constructing meaning.

AN EXPERIMENT WITH CANDIDE

In 1909, when it was clear that the “Musterbürger” collaboration had stalled, and the economic realities of earning a living had made an impression, Klee eagerly assumed the stance of “the illustrator I now want to become experimentally.”²⁴ In this role he produced illustrations to Voltaire’s *Candide*. Klee first read *Candide* in January, 1906, at the urging of his friend Heinz Lotmar. In letters to Lily he exuded admiration for Voltaire’s trenchant wit and spirited intelligence, anointing *Candide* “one of the most striking works in world literature.”²⁵ Klee was not alone in his admiration for a work that seems to have claimed a singular status in his literary pantheon. *Candide* was an international best seller when it was published anonymously in 1759 and has remained so ever since. Its literary longevity lies in the timeless appeal of a rollicking good story and in what Klee deemed “the exquisitely spare and exact expression of the Frenchman’s style.”²⁶ Klee did not mention a series of illustrations until 1909, and it was two years later before he produced any drawings. Undeterred by the “struggling and more struggling” he encountered at the beginning stages of the project, he persisted, completing twenty-six illustrations between 1911 and 1912.²⁷

Since Klee initiated and completed the *Candide* project with no commitment from a publisher, he must have been motivated by considerations other than the hope for commercial success. A passage in *Diaries* confirms that he turned to Voltaire following a series of setbacks in his quest for public recognition, presumably in an attempt to counter an incipient state of depression. Using the paternal form of address, Klee confessed that “Father Voltaire” had helped him recover his “true self.”²⁸ He very likely intuited, and rightly so, that the challenge of illustrating *Candide* would provide an ideal opportunity to refine the graphic skills that had previously and successfully served as the vehicle of his innate penchant for satire.

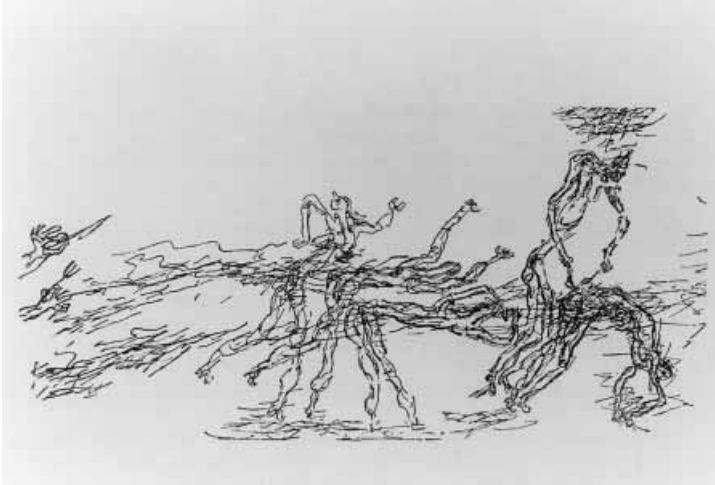
Klee discovered a kindred spirit in Voltaire and a model of satirical commentary in the *conte philosophique*, a literary hybrid that crosses a novel of ideas with an adventure story. Of all Voltaire’s *contes philosophiques*, *Candide* is unquestionably the most widely read and frequently quoted. Voltaire’s masterwork of satirical prose catalogues the disasters endured by the guileless Candide and his hapless companions as they are buffeted



8. Paul Klee, illustration to Chapter 1 of Voltaire's *Candide*, 1920 (from drawing dated 1911/78). Special Collections, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Photograph courtesy of the Learning Resources Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro).

along from one preposterous situation to another, all calculated to ridicule naive optimism. Klee chose to illustrate scenes that reinforce the structural tension of the *conte philosophique*. On the surface, Voltaire's tale is a fast-paced adventure story, but its real purpose is evident in a narrative structure based on the contrasts between a litany of misfortunes and Candide's cheerful refrain in defense of "the best of all possible worlds."²⁹ Klee's illustrations depict a series of catastrophic effects that ultimately make the reader question the "justifiable causes" of misfortune repeatedly cited by Candide.³⁰

The first adversity to befall Candide is his expulsion from the paradise of the Château Thunder-ten-tronckh, the consequence of his harmless gesture of affection for the equally innocent Cunégonde (illustration to Chapter 1) [Figure 8]. Eleven chapters and as many adventures later, the reunited lovers are shocked to learn that their own sufferings pale next to the tortures inflicted on one of their companions in misery by predatory Turkish soldiers (illustration to Chapter 12) [Figure 9]. Voltaire's literary characters exist not as the psychologically complex protagonists of a realistic drama, but as puppets set in motion by the author's ironic intentions. Klee's caricatured figures are their visual counterparts. To approximate the controlled movements of Voltaire's characters, Klee alternated between two figure types: one with the hinged joints of string puppets [Figure 8], another with



9. Paul Klee, illustration to Chapter 12 of Voltaire's *Candide*, 1920 (from drawing dated 1912/38). Special Collections, Jackson Library, University of North Carolina at Greensboro (Photograph courtesy of the Learning Resources Center, University of North Carolina at Greensboro).

contours that are as malleable and elongated as stretched rubber bands [Figure 9]. The figures are placed in staged settings, in some cases framed to reinforce the self-contained episodic nature of a narrative that has been described as repetitive and cumulative but not progressive.³¹

There is documentary as well as visual evidence that Klee's illustrations were the result of calculated effort rather than uninhibited inspiration. A heavily underlined and richly annotated copy of *Candide* in Klee's personal library offers valuable insights into his working method.³² To keep track of his responses over the course of several readings, he marked the text with no fewer than four different graphic instruments (a graphite and a soft blue pencil, as well as two pens, one with a sharp point and black ink, the other with a broad nib and violet ink). In every instance Klee marked those sections he chose to illustrate with an X in the margins, carefully underlining the passages he quoted as the working titles of his drawings, which were subsequently published without titles. Marginal notations in French and German indicate that Klee was attentive to varying both the number of figures and the props that specify settings. Occasionally he made schematic rather than verbal notations, as in a marginal sketch for the drawing to Chapter 13, in which he worked out the compositional relationship of figures, their movements, and their gestures with stick figures no larger than his cursive script.

Klee also explored visual ideas for the *Candide* illustrations in full-scale studies listed in his oeuvre catalogue. Three variants of his illustration to Chapter 12 document a methodical process of trial and error. The version selected for publication vividly depicts the tortures endured by the abducted daughter of Pope Urban X and her unfortunate cohorts in a Turkish harem [Figure 9]. This drawing also stands apart because the quality of the line masterfully captures the incisiveness and verve that Klee so admired in Voltaire's style. Passages in Klee's *Diaries* dating from 1905 to 1910 indicate that this new graphic style evolved from his experiments with the phenomenon of energy.

Once he had completed the etched Inventions, Klee determined to channel his skills with the etching needle in a new direction. After etching into a blackened pane of glass, he remarked on the contrast between the illuminating energy of white lines and the "black energies" of graphite lines on a white ground.³³ Beginning in 1908, he experimented with various graphic equivalents of energy, ranging from tightly concentrated scrawls to more broadly defined, parallel linear rhythms. Shortly before undertaking the *Candide* drawings, Klee found that he needed another kind of line to contain the linear patterns that had evolved into tremulous impressions of energy. After several trials at controlling his nervous energy lines, in the spring of 1911 he reported further progress: "The possibility ripened in me of harmonizing my swarming scribbles with firmly restraining linear boundaries," adding that "the spaces still look a bit empty, but not for much longer!"³⁴

The possibility of combining his linear scrawls with firmly drawn contours is fully realized in the *Candide* illustrations, where the restraining contour lines minimally define the figures and occasional stage props. To the extent that concentrations of the scribbled lines indicate the ground planes, skylines, and lateral frames of generalized settings, the energy lines retain a vestige of the descriptive function they served in landscape studies Klee had described earlier in his *Diaries*. Nevertheless, the principal function of Klee's "swarming scribbles" is to animate the figures and fill the space they occupy. In some drawings the characteristically scrawled lines are contained within the contours delineating the figures [Figure 8]; more often they appear to swarm around the figures like a visible atmospheric force [Figure 9]. Without Klee's graphic notations of energy, the figures would appear to be transparent forms hovering in a white vacuum. His drawings give visual form to a concept of energy that has both aesthetic and scientific dimensions. The term *energy* had long since entered the domain of aesthetic theory and would become a staple of modernist rhetoric during the second decade of

the 20th century. Through his reading of Goethe, Klee would have known Karl Philipp Moritz's compilation of the fine distinctions between aesthetic and plastic energy, both rooted in "active energy."³⁵ Even as Klee was working on his *Candide* illustrations, Apollinaire and Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, the champions of Cubism and Futurism respectively, were adding gradations of meaning to the term energy in their critical writings. Klee did the same in his drawings. In equating energy with substance, both corporeal and atmospheric, he demonstrated that he was knowledgeable about a then-prevalent scientific theory of energy.

The theory that energy is the only real substance in nature was advocated by Wilhelm Ostwald, known at the turn of the century as one of Germany's most prolific, influential, and eccentric scientists. In 1909 Ostwald was awarded the Nobel Prize in chemistry, but he was better known beyond the scientific community as the controversial proponent of energetics, a set of theories that fueled the energetics-atomistics controversy in the mid-1890s and into the first decade of the twentieth century. In the tradition of positivism, Ostwald refused to accept the reality of atoms and molecules because their physical existence had not been verified in a laboratory. His own experiments in physical chemistry led him to the conclusion that matter was simply a manifestation of energy rather than the weight and mass traditionally designated as matter. In *Die Energie*, a comprehensive and popularized version of his theories, Ostwald confidently but prematurely claimed that energetics would be "the science of the future."³⁶ Ironically, *Die Energie* appeared in 1908, the same year French scientists provided the experimental proof of atoms that Ostwald had demanded. Although he then recanted his staunch opposition to atomism, Ostwald continued to defend the aspects of energetics he had previously incorporated into a new system of nature philosophy.

In his *Naturphilosophie* Ostwald questioned the theory of "preestablished harmony" on which the German scientist and philosopher Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz had based his philosophy of optimism.³⁷ Ostwald subsequently used *Die Energie* as a vehicle for proposing that a verifiable form of energy, which he called "nervous" or "psychic" energy, offered a scientifically based alternative to Leibniz's unverifiable theory of "sufficient reason." According to Ostwald, every cause and its corresponding effect constitute a temporal sequence generated not by sufficient reason, but by nervous energy that is unleashed in response to external stimuli and in turn is transformed into other forms of energy.³⁸ Ostwald's concept of nervous energy seems to have been the catalyst that triggered Klee's unique graphic

response to Voltaire's *Candide*, which was written as a challenge to Leibniz's theoretical vision of a preestablished harmony.³⁹

Voltaire's catalogue of catastrophic experiences opens with a calculatedly ingenuous claim of authorship by the German Docteur Ralph, and is peppered throughout with caustic allusions to Leibniz's conviction that the world is a divine creation in which every occurrence is motivated by sufficient reason. In seeking a visual parallel to Voltaire's verbal contempt of Leibniz's philosophy, Klee identified an unwitting ally in Ostwald, who found Leibniz's theory of preestablished harmony as absurd as Voltaire had. Quite by chance, Klee's first reading of *Candide* coincided with his initial studio investigations into graphic equivalents of energy. After numerous readings of *Candide*, Klee would not have missed the potential of Ostwald's theory of energetics as a conceptual bridge between the experiments he was conducting in his studio and Voltaire's satirical attack on Leibniz. To continue the cumulative chain of responses to Leibniz, Klee chose scenes that give lie to *Candide*'s naive optimism, and illustrated them in a linear style informed by Ostwald's scientifically grounded opposition to Leibniz's theory of preordained cause and effect. Instead of giving literal form to Voltaire's descriptive imagery, Klee created visual metaphors of what Ostwald would have characterized as nervous energy, thus anticipating his own often quoted aphorism that the purpose of art is to make visible, not to reproduce the visible.

Klee's swarming scribbles make visible both the invisible phenomenon of nervous energy that was the subject of Ostwald's *Die Energie* and the verbal energy, or *enargeia*, that gives Voltaire's text its satirical punch. As defined in treatises on rhetoric, the quality of *enargeia* is effected by vividly descriptive passages, unusual figures of speech, and theatrical posturing.⁴⁰ As a visual artist Klee would have been particularly sensitized to those rhetorical devices that appeal to the reader's visual faculties. That he chose to respond to this aspect of Voltaire's narrative indicates a conscious decision not to privilege story over discourse, as previous illustrators of *Candide* had done, or to imitate the stylistic conventions of eighteenth-century visual imagery, as his correspondent Alfred Kubin would do for a 1922 illustrated edition of *Candide*. Analyzed in literary terms, Klee's illustrations constitute a visual subtext of Voltaire's frame narrative. Michael Riffaterre has postulated that subtexts are embedded in all narratives and, like extended metaphors, are often manifested at the level of discourse.⁴¹ In illustrating *Candide* with a visual subtext that relates his studio experiments with energy to Voltaire's application of the rhetorical concept of *enargeia*, Klee served his

own artistic ends as well as Voltaire's text. The *Candide* illustrations exemplify a new graphic style that incorporates the idea that a common creative energy is inherent in all forms of art and nature. This is a fundamental principle of the Germanic tradition of nature philosophy that had a formative influence on many of Klee's studio and pedagogical practices. From the very beginning of his commitment to the visual arts, Klee expressed an aversion to theory based on pure speculation, just as Ostwald had done. He seems to have recognized in Ostwald's theory of energetics an experimental justification of his tentative theoretical convictions, and in Voltaire's *Candide* an opportunity to apply theory to creative practice.

A PICTORIAL GLOSS ON POTSDAMER PLATZ

By chance, Klee's illustrated *Candide* was published in the same year as his illustrations to Curt Corrinth's *Potsdamer Platz*. Although he had completed the *Candide* drawings in 1912, potential publishers were not quick to nibble. After the war he finally placed them with the Munich firm of Kurt Wolff. Even before finalizing this arrangement, he was approached about illustrations to *Potsdamer Platz*. Details of the commission are sketchy. The entry in his *Diaries* for November 3, 1918 is an edited version of a letter to his son Felix in which Klee wrote that he had responded to an inquiry from Georg Müller-Verlag about illustrations to "Curt Korrinth's [sic] *Potsdamer Platz*." The unedited letter contains the additional information that Klee had agreed to send either a previously completed drawing or a new one, depending on the amount of the honorarium.⁴² A month later he wrote to Lily, indicating that the commission from Müller-Verlag was forthcoming.⁴³ Given the number of drawings in Klee's oeuvre catalogue and in the illustrated edition of *Potsdamer Platz*, Müller-Verlag's financial offer must have made it worthwhile to negotiate an entire series of illustrations. Presumably working from a typescript, a proof, or an advance copy of Corrinth's ninety-page novella, Klee produced five drawings during the last months of 1918, in addition to numerous others not related to the commission. Resuming the project early in 1919, following his Christmas leave and self-authorized discharge from military service, Klee completed four other illustrations and a title page.

Müller-Verlag was one of several German publishers that launched new authors and new works with first editions illustrated by contemporary artists. When the manuscript of *Potsdamer Platz* was accepted for publication sometime during the summer or fall of 1918, Corrinth was a little known but promising writer. Müller-Verlag no doubt predicted that the work's

full title, *Potsdamer Platz oder die Nächte des neuen Messias: Ekstatische Visionen von Curt Corrinth*, and its no less provocative contents, would pique the curiosity of a post-war German public that was all too eager for escapist fantasies. The plan to include reproductions of drawings by Klee was no doubt intended to attract critical and popular attention by pairing the work of two new talents. Klee's title page, dated 1919, indicates that he thought the illustrated edition would appear in that year. Instead, the first printing of 5,000 copies of *Potsdamer Platz* was published in 1919 with no illustrations. A second printing of 500, with Klee's photomechanically reproduced illustrations and a preface by critic Eckart von Sydow, appeared in 1920. Whether the special edition was issued to enhance sales or to capitalize on the novella's anticipated success is not clear.

The question of why the publishing house chose to engage Klee for illustrations is less problematical. Klee was first introduced to Georg Müller in 1912 by Alfred Mayer, a mutual acquaintance who attempted unsuccessfully to arrange a contract for the *Candide* illustrations. Although Müller demurred at the time, he apparently kept Klee's name in mind for future projects and followed his career.⁴⁴ After he died in 1917, his successors gambled on the hunch that Klee would be the right match for an illustrated edition of *Potsdamer Platz*. By 1918 Klee had earned the reputation of a visionary through exposure in Herwarth Walden's influential *Der Sturm* publication and gallery, as well as in articles by several contemporary critics. Müller-Verlag must have calculated that his otherworldly landscapes would be the ideal graphic settings for Corrinth's "ecstatic visions." Klee lived up to expectations, producing drawings that are liberally interspersed with motifs and figure types from his established repertoire of cosmic and apocalyptic imagery.

The protagonist of Corrinth's *Potsdamer Platz* is a self-appointed, delusional Messiah who dreams of salvation for prostitutes through free love. From the vantage point of the late twentieth century, it reads as a sexist travesty of contemporary feminist demands for emancipation. In 1919, however, it was relished as a vicarious indulgence in sexual fantasy, thinly disguised by evangelistic fervor. Drawings such as *You He-Man, oh-oh, oh You!* (Illustration 4) [Figure 10] suggest that Klee himself was not entirely immune to such erotic fantasies, although he was careful to distance his image from the misogynistic violence detailed in Corrinth's text. There is compelling visual evidence that the sequence of events constituting the story told in *Potsdamer Platz* was less interesting to Klee than other aspects of Corrinth's narrative. Even *You He-Man*, which comes as close to framing and representing a specific episode in the narrative as any of Klee's



10. Paul Klee, *You He-Man, oh-oh, oh You*, Illustration 4 to Corrinth's *Potsdamer Platz*, 1920 (from drawing dated 1919/14). The Spencer German Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. © The New York Public Library.

to Kubin, Klee confided that he had found Corrinth's writing (*Dichtung*) not particularly remarkable,⁴⁶ implying that he recognized the sources of Corrinth's recycled themes and stylistic devices. Klee might well have recalled the celebration of the prostitute from Johannes Becher's "Klänge aus Utopia" (1916) and insurrection by a self-anointed messiah from Ernst Lotz's "Aufbruch der Jugend" (1916). At the very least he would have recognized that Corrinth's rhetoric was by then the stock in trade of German Expressionist poetry and prose. Even so, he admitted to Kubin that the process of internalizing and visualizing Corrinth's narrative had ultimately proved to be a rewarding challenge.⁴⁷ A comparison between Klee's initial responses to *Potsdamer Platz* and the illustrations completed in the spring of 1919 shows how his visual thinking changed in the course of several months.

During an initial spurt of activity Klee completed Illustrations 2, 8, 9, 5, and 3. The common denominators of these drawings are minimally defined

illustrations, aestheticizes a scene of graphic sexual violence by transforming it into a generalized image of orgasmic rapture. Most of his other illustrations, including *Yet Berlin, our Stronghold, Recorded a Tenfold Increase in her Citizenry* (Illustration 6) [Figure 11], substitute polymorphic symbols for representational imagery that relates mimetically to the text. Klee's use of such multifaceted visual metaphors as the tower structure parallels Corrinth's use of a poetic prose that typifies the discourse of German Expressionist literature.

If Klee perceived in Corrinth's ecstatic visions a coded, subversive challenge to the precarious social order of post-war Germany,⁴⁵ he would also have recognized in Corrinth's rhetorical devices an equally contentious challenge to the conventions of narrative literature. In a letter of January 1, 1920



11. Paul Klee, *Yet Berlin, our Stronghold, Recorded a Tenfold Increase in her Citizenry*, Illustration 6 to Corinth's *Potsdamer Platz*, 1920 (from drawing dated 1919/15). The Spencer German Collection, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. © The New York Public Library.

spatial settings and figure types that can be described as the predecessors of Gummy. The pronounced vertical orientations, rubbery-limbed figures, and dreamscape settings made their appearance in Klee's stylistic vocabulary in 1912, shortly after he completed the illustrations to *Candide*. The drawings completed in 1919 (the title page and numbers 4, 6, 7, and 10) retain the vertical compositional format, which lends coherence to the series as a whole, and visually paraphrases the frenzied, climactic rhythms of Corinth's descriptive passages.⁴⁸ In these later illustrations, the negative spaces that surround the linear figurations of the 1918 drawings are filled with dense areas of cross hatching and patterns of striated or latticed lines. Once the illustrations were placed in their textual setting, these differences in the character of Klee's line served to reinforce Corinth's constant shifts

in narrative voice, focus, and mode of expression. Like other contemporary writers, Corinth manipulated such shifts in a conscious effort to break down conventional distinctions between the literary and visual arts. Klee's Opus I and passages in his letters and "Creative Credo" confirm that he too dismissed such distinctions as hopelessly old-fashioned. The illustrations to *Potsdamer Platz*, in particular drawings 6, 7, and 10, represented his most successful and sustained effort to date in demonstrating that "space, too, is a temporal concept."⁴⁹ It can be argued that Corinth's text served as a literary model for this particular step in Klee's ongoing struggle to craft his own pictorial language within the cultural context of time/space and word/image intersections.

A few examples will suffice to demonstrate how Corinth disrupted the temporal flow of his narrative continuum, filling the resulting gaps with spatial elements that function both rhetorically and literally. The most readily apparent breaks are those precipitated by abrupt shifts from narrative writing to a kind of free verse. These breaks are marked by short lines of quasi-Biblical invocations or exclamatory refrains and by sections of text that stretch out in uneven lines, forming staggered patterns of words that visually punctuate the open expanse of the page. The intrusion of space is also evident in descriptive passages that develop extended spatial metaphors, as in the paragraph ending with the line excerpted as the title of Illustration 6 [Figure 11]. This passage, which begins with brief references to Paris and London and continues with a list of no fewer than seventeen other capital cities, verbally maps the influx of prostitutes to Berlin from all over the world.⁵⁰ Other passages suspend the narrative flow by introducing descriptions of the city, and in particular Potsdamer Platz, a bustling metropolitan hub that was reputed to be Europe's most heavily trafficked square in the postwar years. As in other city novels of the early twentieth century, most notably James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and Alfred Döblin's *Berlin Alexanderplatz* (1929), the city is not simply the setting of a story, but a model for the structure of a text that is experienced both temporally and spatially.

Following the example of Corinth, who had introduced spatial metaphors into the narrative time of his novel, Klee inserted verbal signs into the pictorial space of his illustrations. The name BERLIN invades the space of Illustration 6 [Figure 11], which reduces the global migration mapped in Corinth's text to an abstracted cosmic landscape energized by arrows pointing to a visual symbol of the city. Although the setting is identified by city name, Klee followed the lesson learned while working on the "Musterbürger" drawings. That is, he avoided more specific references

to locale, such as the street names George Grosz incorporated into his images, the facade of the Potsdamer Bahnhof pictured in some of Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's paintings, or the framed, fragmented views of Potsdamer Platz that make up Walter Ruttmann's 1927 documentary film *Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Grosstadt*. Instead, Klee opted for a tower structure modeled on contemporary descriptions of Berlin.

One source he may well have consulted was Ludwig Meidner's 1914 essay entitled "An Introduction to Painting Big Cities," which combined Futurist theories about lines of force with an impassioned defense of the dynamic, if unlovely, features of urban Berlin.⁵¹ Writing in prose that was as fervent as Corrinth's, Meidner urged artists to take inspiration from the rail network, the towering buildings, the iron suspension bridges, and the tangle of telephone wires that gave the contemporary cityscape its particular character and appearance. Meidner was not the only observer of Berlin's urban frenzy to describe the city in these terms. Onomatopoeic images of express trains roar through the gritty urban landscape of Grosz's "Berlin 1917," and by the early 1920s the Russian writer Viktor Shklovsky would invoke the switch tracks of Berlin's municipal rail system as a metaphor of the city as a whole.⁵² These features of Berlin's urban setting were also appropriated by Corrinth and other contemporary fiction writers who adapted the labyrinth image as a model of narrative structure.⁵³ Klee did the same, envisioning the city in Illustration 6 as a vertical labyrinth that reduces Berlin's vast network of trolley tracks and elevated railway bridges to a graphic abstraction. Variations on this urbanized labyrinth function simultaneously as symbol and structure in the last three of Klee's illustrations to *Potsdamer Platz*, indicating that he must have considered this an entirely satisfactory solution to the problem of how to spatialize the temporal rhythms of Corrinth's city novel.

The inevitable analogy between Klee's towering labyrinthine structure and the mythical Tower of Babel was not lost on his contemporaries. In von Sydow's introduction to the illustrated edition of *Potsdamer Platz*, he made particular mention of the "babylonische Turm Berlins."⁵⁴ His trope was a fitting symbol of a city that drew immigrants from all over Europe – a fact that no doubt inspired Corrinth's fantasy of Berlin as a mecca for the prostitutes of the world, and that would later prompt Stefan Zweig to look back on Berlin as the "Babel of the world."⁵⁵ Berlin as a modern-day Tower of Babel evokes the idea of a city where the disintegration of social order is synonymous with the breakdown of communication. This association sets Klee's visual symbol of Berlin apart from the Eiffel Tower and Vladimir Tatlin's projected Monument to the Third International – both

architectural monuments to the modern city, global communication, and advances in engineering technology. Klee's tower is an erector-set version of engineering marvels such as these. It might have amused Meidner, who had urged artists to respond to the city like engineers, unless he perceived Klee's parody as willful mockery.

Engineers designed not only the utilitarian structures of Berlin, but also its architectural fantasies. Klee's visual memories of Berlin were garnered from several visits. During a whirlwind trip with his friend Bloesch in April, 1906, he enjoyed the sophisticated pleasures of exhibitions and opera. Briefer trips in January and February of 1917 were devoted exclusively to the business of selling art.⁵⁶ Although Klee does not seem to have been tempted by the low-brow entertainment hawked at Berlin's Luna Park, the largest amusement park in Europe, he no doubt caught glimpses of its movie-set architecture and motorized rides as his trains sped through Grunewald, past the Halensee, en route to and from Berlin. Klee would also have known Luna Park by reputation among contemporary artists. A number of artists, including Max Pechstein and Rudolf Belling, were commissioned to design Expressionist sculpture for the grounds, and Grosz saw in its gaudy splendors a microcosm of the world he apostrophized in his 1918 poem "Gesang an die Welt." For Berlin natives and throngs of tourists alike, Luna Park represented a fantasy world similar in at least some respects to that imagined by Corinth. Fully aware of the implications, Klee borrowed freely from the Luna Park culture of hedonistic good times to design his symbol of Berlin as a thoroughly modern Babel. His gridwork tower, studded with cross-hatched stars, is a cross between the illuminated roller coaster that was built into the terraced setting of Luna Park and the "cable railway dressed up to look like a skyscraper," which was cited as one of Luna Park's most popular mechanized attractions in Curt Moreck's guide to "depraved" Berlin.⁵⁷

Klee's fantasy architecture is an ideal setting for Corinth's literary fantasies, although not for the reasons that probably motivated Müller-Verlag's commission. Just as the scale of Klee's illustrations creates a gap between his mini-monument to high-tech engineering and its full-scale prototypes, Klee's humor establishes an ironic distance between his visual images and the breathless, at times bombastic, intensity of Corinth's descriptive prose. In his letter to Kubin assessing the *Potsdamer Platz* project, Klee claimed that whatever success he may have achieved in producing illustrations that transcended the ordinary was attributable to his having maintained an "independence of mind."⁵⁸ Klee did not elaborate, but it seems plausible that on one level he was alluding to the parodic stance he had maintained vis à vis Corinth's verbal imagery and the visual vocabulary used