

# THE KLEKSOGRAPH

An International Review of Art and the Subconscious

Issue 7 January 2022

**Article: Why Abstract?**

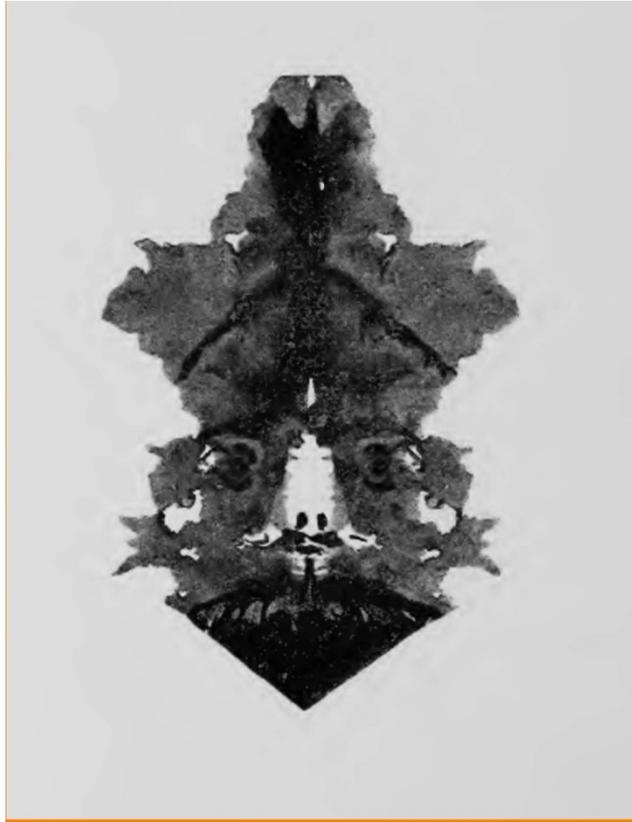
**Fiction by: Gary Bolick, Bruach Mohr, Robin Fuller,  
Ian C. Smith**

**Poetry by: David Radavich, Phil Wood, Mary  
Henessey, Martin Ferguson, Sam Barbee**



# **THE KLEKSOGRAPH**

**Editor: Peter Van Belle**



**ISSUE 7**

**JANUARY 2022**

**In the mid-nineteenth century, Justinus Kerner, published his book of “Kleksographien”. Later psychologists used similar ink blots as a means of access the subconscious of their patients. The Kleksograph (Klecks is the official German spelling) is dedicated to exploring and celebrating the relationship between the subconscious and art.**

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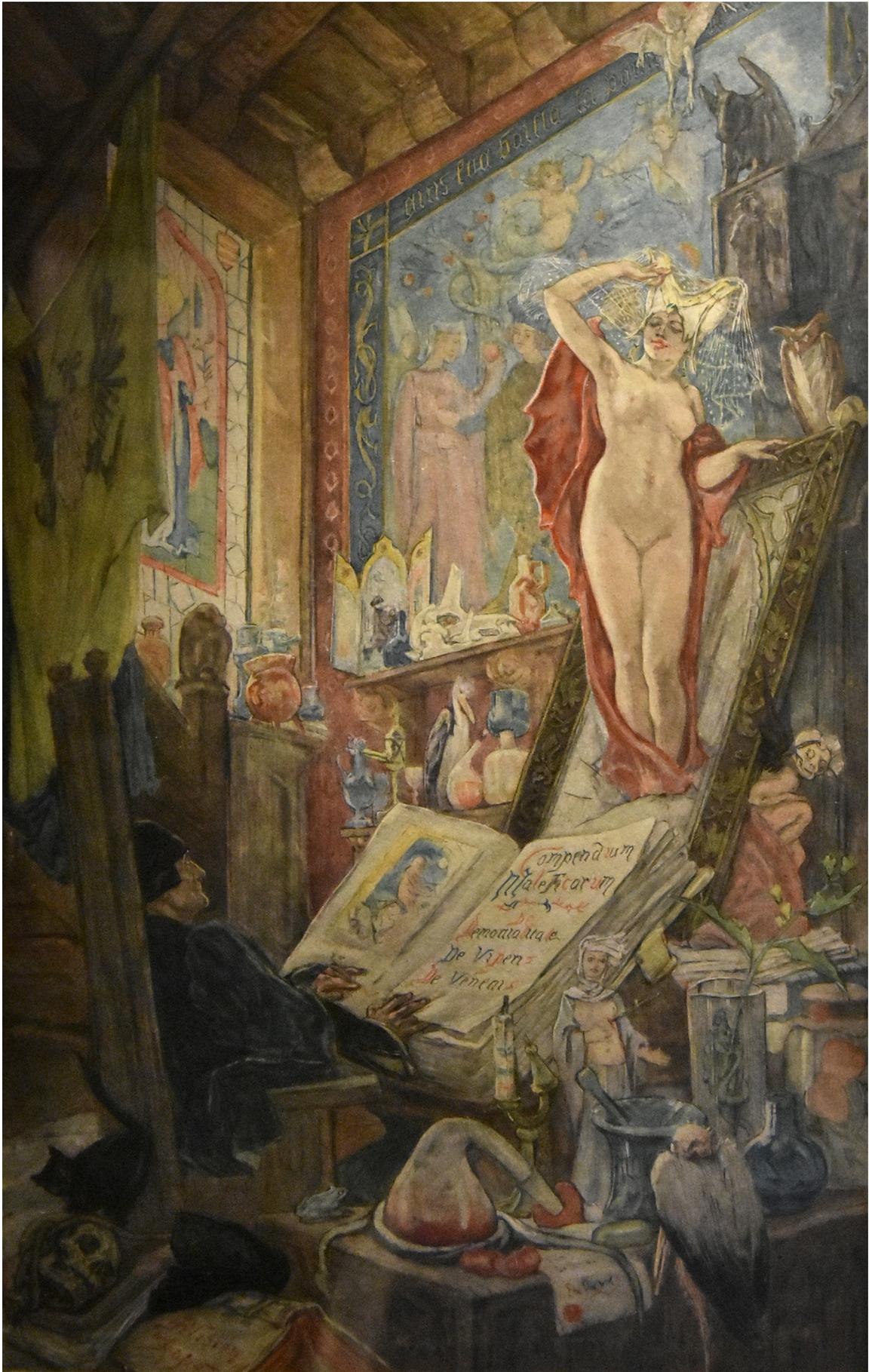
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Cover: Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Circular Segments; page 10: collage by Peter Van Belle

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# Gary Bolick

## Corner of Elvis and Paradise

---

Evening in the desert. No gods here, only the echo of their swagger: twisting shadows of steam spiraling up and out of manhole covers which, for a moment, freeze into place, the impression of permanence and possibility. Translucent statues appearing as real and as sure as the last wager: "Snake-eyes!" swept off the table.

Lost and wandering, the wash, the click-and-clatter of slot machines wearing the senses down to a fine powder, the shoreline growing more distant, home and hearth a memory, no war to fight, he measures his next move. Turning, the Siren call fuels the long-lost hormonal jolt. No fear, here, as the bow pitches and the waves push hard for the rocks. Only the proud whispers of a youth suddenly rekindled,

"She wants *me!*"

Steering hard and fast, the wheel grows more responsive within his grasp as she smiles and nods and with a smoky-sweet lilt in her voice purrs, "What's your room number? Yes, sugar, you're the one for me. Another C-note and I'll be Princess Leia, OK, sailor?"

Viagra-fueled-carburetors recall, the roar and moan, the guttural release of a four-on-the-floor-rusted-out-youth. Still, for a brief moment plaster-like and transparent, all imaginary statues linger just long enough to make the viewer pause before saying,

"It's all right sugar. I know. I know you were really something amazing back then. Hell, we all were! Be a dear. Just pull straight up, can't reach the zipper any more. Now, now, you can still call me sugar. That'd be real nice. You're just a teddy bear, you are."

Adrift, sailing without water, morning in the desert, becomes an odyssey of wandering dreams wondering how and why they resurrect themselves—here. Still,

"Why sugar, you'd be amazed. Early, sunrise, is the best. Old hound dogs all itchin' like they's on their first date. New light is like the raised skirt of a debutante; makes both of you anxious, insistent, like it's forbidden and, well sure. You want to?"

*Again? And this one will, ah, sure, I'm sure it'll be the one. It's double, though, in full light, sugar.*

New light like new skin gives the often-practiced ceremony new steam. Out from the same belching manhole covers; fresh, translucent dreams-in-the-desert—appear. Across the vista, cooling neon of every color—save, for any natural ones—flickers before going blind for the day. So, what's your pleasure? Sugar or Sweet-and-Low? You choose.

"It's my usual corner, sugar, everyone in this world knows *that!* You're a sight, aint' you, but didn't much like the books, huh? What? C'mon sugar, it's just the light. The desert. Hot, dry and confusing! The *real one*, he's dead! But yes! That fella, there? Yes, that there's sure enough a man *playin'* Elvis. See 'um everywhere.

"Now, sugar, I'll sure enough, go you one better. See it? Look up at those road signs. Why do you think it's *my corner!* See it? Didn't even know it, did you. There you go, sugar, we was just meant to be! Told you! You're standing on the corner of Elvis and Paradise! Imagine that? Just the way the good lord intended it. What's that, sugar? Sure! You got a

room? C-note for the first twenty minutes, and no rough stuff. See him? That's Leon, just to the left of no, not that Elvis, the other one, the one with the red hair. Any rough stuff, now, and Leon, there, will hunt you down and cut it off! OK, Sugar?"

\*Actual street address in Las Vegas Elvis Presley Boulevard and Paradise Road.

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# Gary Bolick

## Diagnosis: A Raving Kinetoscope

---

A Penny Arcade: flickering, yellowed cards so . . . become you. And this time? “The war to end all wars,” never stopped. It plays in-and-out-in all of us—forever—in some particular way. Mine?

*Mornings and days bleed through white-yellow-white cards leaving me alone until gazing up into the empty street light. Just there, please, yes.*

Returning and alone, on this corner, I hear your whispers augment: rows and rows of rubber wheels, an endless procession tracing through my head slicing then splicing back together the fractured noon air as the clapper—thundered. Number twelve sounded—again—so I must start counting back to one, so as to look away and down, then up, hoping to *feel* . . . *what?*

Pity? Impossible! Unless we are paper or perhaps sheet metal, something, anything that burns or shines, allowing us to imprint some signal of smoke, or smear of ash, maybe a flash or sound—here and now. No? Perhaps, then, I’m but the last dream of a dying soldier at Verdun. In that way we can be together, and so we live—on.

Yes, love, I am a vision. No, make that a hallucination. My hair and glasses recalling, yes, your grandfather’s. Color-of-eye-and-hair? No? To match the color would remind you of?

Turn away!

*Sorry, love!*

Too vivid—even now—the howitzer’s bark that stamped us together-still-howls. Better to be farther down into his boiled-out brain along with the dead worms. Remember? We were four for dinner. Meat was scared. A war to end, perhaps, all of us? To end the exhaustion of . . . what else could any of us do? So, you plucked them—the dead worms—up and out from the roasted pig. Smiling, you whispered,

*Bullet paths.*

Silly, these rolling and revolving white-and-yellow memories—days. It is all I have left, all that I might sweep up to call: *my own*, before hoisting it up into the wind.

*She and I, like buds of lichen plucked from the forest floor. Scattering now.*

Always the boot-smack-and-tank-tread-tracking in the center of my head as they continue to marched us until death would have been a revelation. Stop. OK? Now! Turn the crank.

*In that time, I loved her—more—than is allowed—then or—now. Funny how time moves when you control the crank. What? Yes, OK, OK, turn it!*

From a turning crank to this friendly, stoic streetlight, I look for her constantly wondering if the fireflies and moths chasing the light are bits of shiny shrapnel seared into our brain as we made love. No, it was not actually *her*. But *she* was always under me. No, forever and only, a part of the dream, the dream echoing up from the dead soldier—there and—there, and . . . countless more and more, yes, even more—there.



So, I must haunt the light of street corners and deserted cafes, to find another card to insert into the rolling white and yellow memory that burns so hot without *her*. Stop! More grease for the crank! No!

His hand was sure, and the smile: warm and sweet as he hoisted her up—first. No, a horse, *Dare not throw her!*

Still, a frozen image, like all those left along the road. If only the damned crank would work this time. Having her under me would blessedly finish *me*. See? One, then two, now ten, yellow-and-white-memories like moths—there—crashing and flashing, moving the streetlight to flicker out a warning:

*Hear the electric hum? As you wish.*

*She* will kill me as we make love in the morning. Black hair, forest green eyes and rouge we all knew to be too thick. Yet, we all must cling to it *now as then in order* to survive in his mind.

Remembered? Who? The fourth one for dinner yes, mine, *that one*. *She*, who laughed so gently and died so shortly after I kissed her for the first. Only this revolving time, the spinning-card-memories-and-then out and under—there—to stand under and stare straight up into this light will now and forever hold me and—*us*—steady—now.

*Here:*

Time and memory flicker past. A life stilled and flapping in a blur of white-yellow moments that are, invariably, coaxed up to the sheen and heat of an electric glow. Popping, sparking and then collapsing the Armistice is signed. Another day—won.



Felix Vallotton, Verdun, 1917

# Gary Bolick

## Verdun Coda

---

“One moment, one love, one time that reconnects the puzzle I see each night laid out above me . . . the stars . . . where in, if I could discover the sketch, the painting dangled nightly before my eyes . . . the inside and out, the blood and skin of each dream and idea would then suddenly sit before me as clear and serene as the sugar bowl and cream pitcher resting on my kitchen table each morning . . . but since I draw like a child, and cipher like an ox, (that is to say I’ll never make a lasting, a permanent contribution to man) I’ll continue now in what little time left me to haunt the same alleys of my infant/youth/middle age, from this bed, desperately looking for an errant stare from a waking vagrant in my memory or is he actually there . . . now, there, to light the fire within my head. Yes, here, now as before, I’ll connect the stars . . . a random act of life and living and love . . . take the one, the only thing that sustains me and ride it until I suppose, I dissolve . . . into that very same moment . . . because I believe that each moment is infused with the blood of all time . . . like a pregnant mare about to fold, it opens up and releases into the light, gravity and time of that instant a lineage that each of us can ride in and out, backwards and forwards to the far reaches of our own experience.”

# David Radavich

## Lotus

---

The universe of life  
in the reach of one being.

Sodden, ugly roots  
sucking up nutrients,  
hidden as sin  
yet longing, innocent,

leaves flat against  
the mutable world,  
struggling for balance,

all the beauty above,  
perfectly white, endlessly  
layered, taking all  
the credit for the hard  
work of others,

maybe ashamed  
to be associated with  
the lower orders

yet still radiant  
as a dream  
long wished for.

Do we choose to  
pluck it from its place

or let it be  
a mirror of the eye

across rippling waters  
sitting god across  
the sky?

# David Radavich

## Non-equivalence

---

Nothing translates  
into something else—  
language, your face,  
ideas, this blue Earth—

without significant loss.

I have tried to move  
between like a shuttlecock,  
flying, sorting, falling,  
sometimes over the net,  
otherwise into the ground  
like a confused bird.

Who could transpose  
your mind, your body  
from one chord to another?

Even the seasons  
are not interchangeable—  
this blanket of snow  
not a harbinger  
but a thieving quiet  
that stills all  
blooming and lament.

# Bruach Mhor

## Overthinking People

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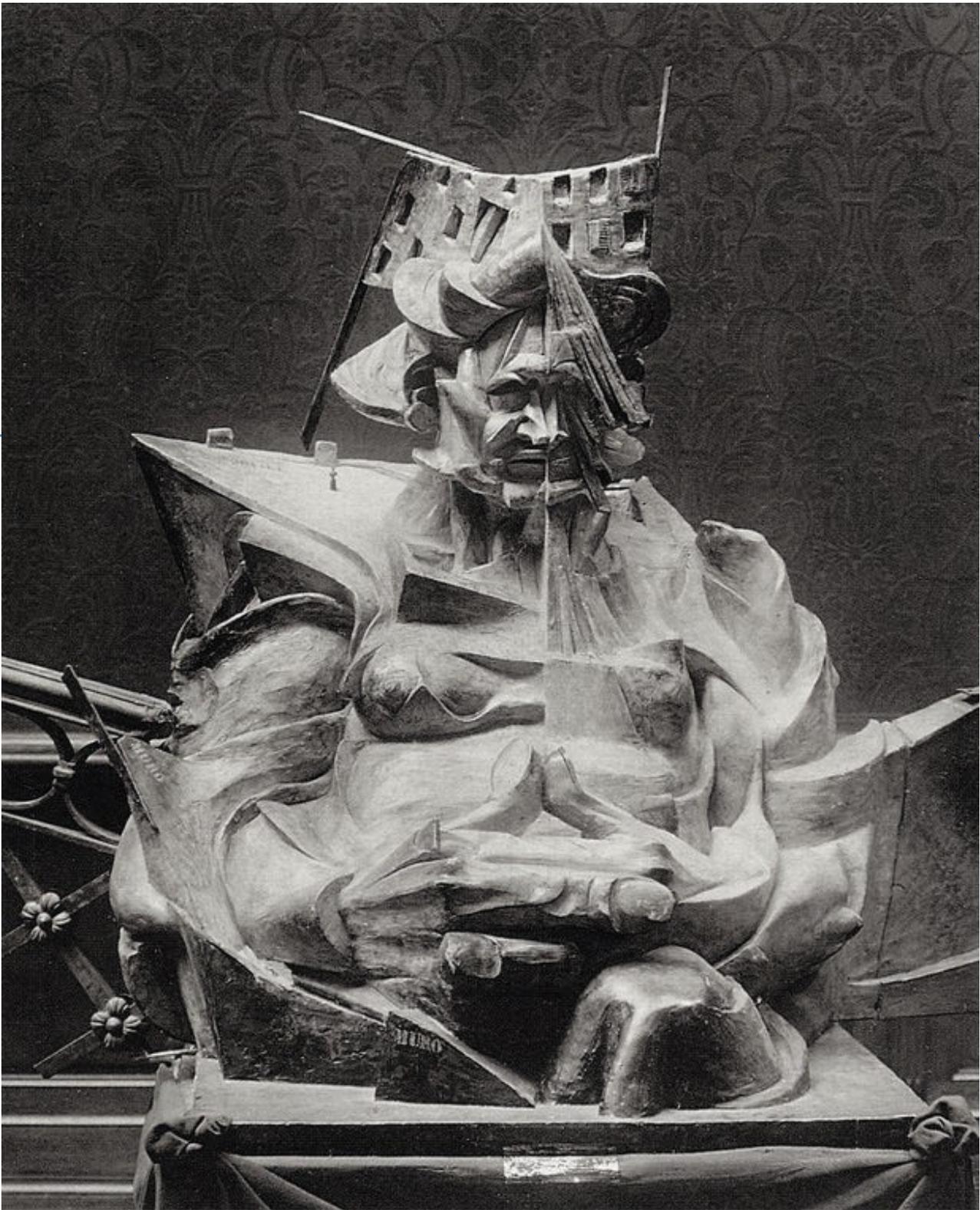
Mr Chalk, the friendliest man in the village, stood beside his front window near dawn, ready to welcome the arriving light. He did so every morning.

Later, Mr Chalk, the friendliest man in the village, stood by his front window near dusk, ready to welcome the arriving darkness. He did so every evening.

But then he had an alarming thought. Perhaps darkness is merely the absence of light and so there is nothing to greet in the evening? He retreated to his bedroom.

Six months later, Mr Chalk, the rudest man in the village, walked along the main street ignoring people with their greetings, viewing them as merely absences of empty space.

He was eventually treated by being prescribed moonlight.



*Umberto Boccioni, Head+House+Light, 1912, believed destroyed*

# Phil Wood

## Id

---

The alter ego births in hunger,  
gnaws a knotted pipe  
behind the pumping machine,  
escapes in inky regret, perfumes over  
chessboard thought.  
It smells of citrus.

And when this new born  
rolls gambits across the heart,  
fervent, frantic, flawed -  
the ego armed with fountain pen,  
clinging like an Acme fool -  
then the write of cartoons beckons.

And if this animation  
should infuse the spiral stairs,  
find breath along silky synapses -  
its red tongue  
cleaving commotion -  
where would the connections go?

Litter meanders over the ocean,  
ego coupling with alter ego,  
and with an impulsive click -  
the waves shiver  
shadows inked in motion,  
animator and animated.

# Phil Wood

## The Waves

---

I open a window for night hours -  
sea sucking the shingle, jellyfish  
asleep on your breast, a fly  
stuck on the nipple, all buzz  
boast of time suckling on milk,  
an itch to scratch that scab,  
a slow claw frays net curtains,  
buckets of fish-heads winking,  
all that fracture of relics sunk  
in subsoil, crabs scuttle  
from gull joy, my pocket  
of pebbles flung at the lighthouse  
as useless as counting waves.  
There is someone I let drown.

# Peter Van Belle

## Why Abstract?

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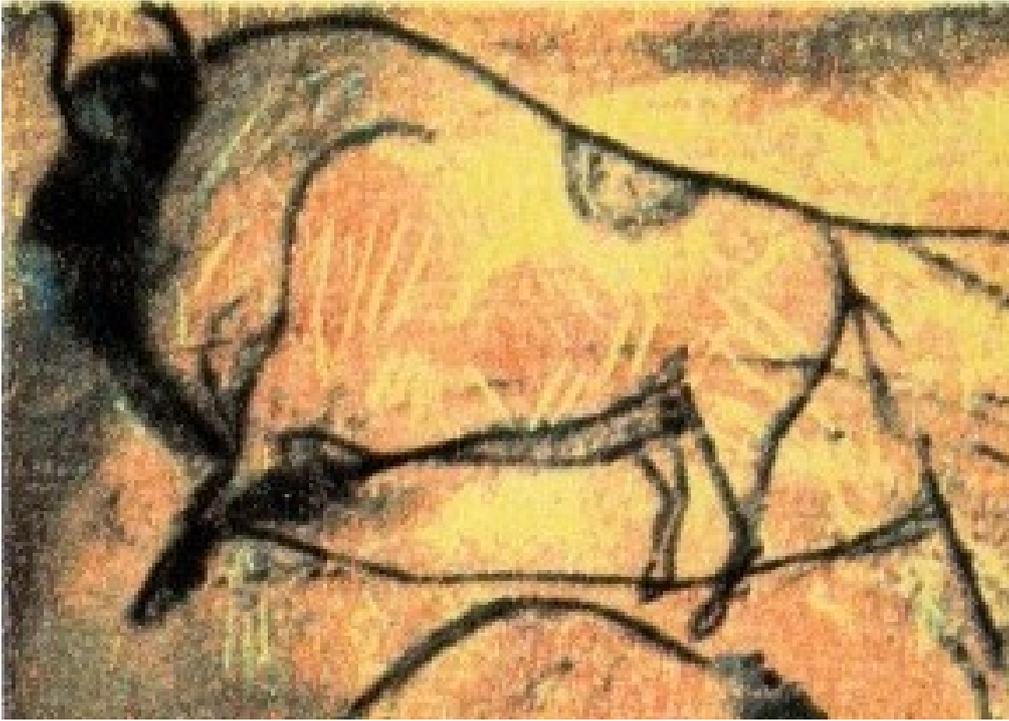
I came upon this subject while reading *The Inkblots* by Damion Searls, a biography of Hermann Rorschach, and an account of the subsequent use, and abuse, of his famous test. There were references to philosophers, psychologists, and art historians who had studied the phenomenon of abstract art.

To say I approached it with a closed mind is untrue, but I admit I'm not a fan. Yet I found a liking for the works of certain artists, such as Paul Klee, or Moholy-Nagy, whose work is on the cover.

There are numerous definitions of the term abstract. In its broadest sense it means extracting something general from the specific. When it comes to art it means a process of extracting the subject from reality. All art involves abstraction in that sense, except absolute abstraction, which has no connection to the outside world. Among the most famous exponents of this style are late Kandinsky, Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, Mondrian, and Kazimir Malevich.

Though we often think of abstract art as a modern phenomenon, it has in fact always existed. And this poses a question: why has there always been an impulse to abstract?

To give you an example of the two styles existing side by side, I first present the cave paintings on the next pages, one from a cave in Altamira, Spain, another from a cave in Chauvet, France, both show an ancient bison that's been killed (hence the "tiptoe" pose), and both share the same style. Yet they were painted 10000 years apart. The youngest, those from Altamira, date from 15000 years ago. We can safely conclude that the similarity in style is due to an effort to paint the animals realistically. Contrast that to the *Venus of Lespugue*, of the same region and period as the paintings at Chauvet, but which could easily pass as the work of a modern sculptor. So clearly prehistoric people already had an impulse for abstraction.



The bison at Chauvet

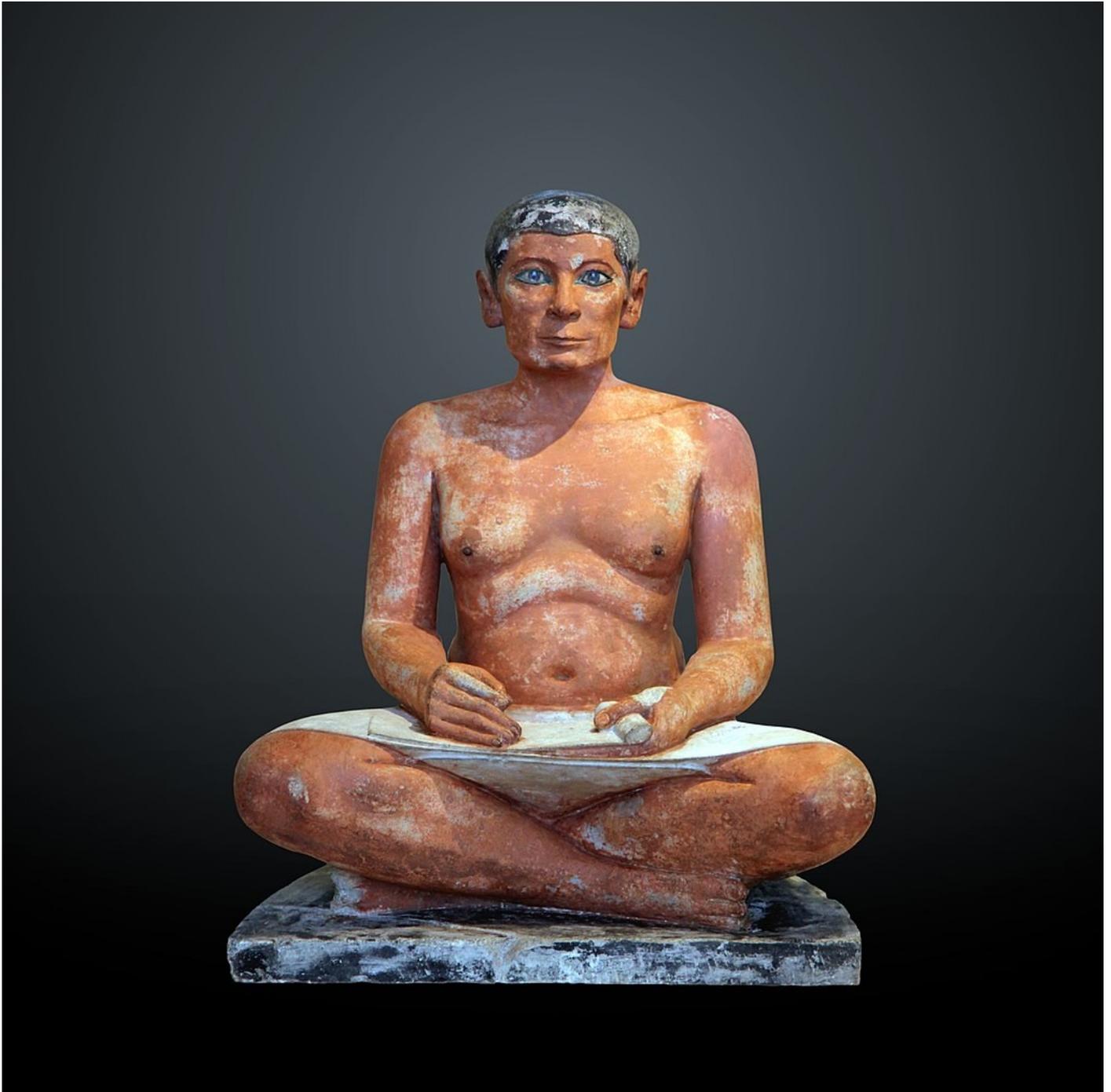


The bison at Altamira



The Venus of Lespugue (replica)

As a second example I present this work from ancient Egypt, a statue of a seated scribe. It might surprise you to know that it was made in the same era as the pyramids at Giza (2600 BCE). The pyramids, when newly built, would've stood out from the surrounding landscape as white triangles with golden tops.



The Seated Scribe, collection The Louvre, Paris

Yet there have also been cultures with little abstract art, such as the Greco-Roman culture, the Renaissance, and Realist art of the 19th century.

On an individual level, abstraction is evident in children's drawings. As you will read in the rest of the article, this fact presents a conundrum to some art historians and psychologists.

### Abstraction and Empathy



It's hard not to feel anything while looking at George Stubbs's picture *Horse Attacked by a Lion*. It is a picture of ferocity and terror, as displayed by the lion emerging from darkness to attack the white horse.

This phenomenon, of objects provoking emotions, was studied by a group of 19<sup>th</sup> century philosophers and art historians. They felt something different from Aristotle's concept of catharsis was at play. The philosopher Robert Vischer called the effect *Einfühlung* (feeling in) to distinguish it from *Verstehen* (understanding). The term was further clarified by Theodor Lipps as "projecting oneself onto the object of perception." Lipps's ideas on emotions were to influence Sigmund Freud, among many.

Another follower of Lipps, Wilhelm Worringer, published a popular dissertation called *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*. The American Edward Titchener, when translating it, invented the word “empathy” as a translation for *Einfühlung*, so adding a new word to the English language.

Worringer’s theory was that the process of empathy involves putting one’s psyche into the object of observation, as Lipps had stated. In art this gives one the pleasurable feeling of life, a sense of power, thought, striving, and activity, an assertion of the Self. This sort of empathy is to be considered in its broadest sense, not just a feeling, but also an identification.

The object under observation can also induce rejection. This happens when the sense of Self conflicts with the characteristics of the object. Lipps called this negative empathy, and it is perceived as ugliness, a confinement, or a negative compulsion.

Worringer observed, however, that these ideas could only apply to realist art, which meant that other styles of art were caused and experienced through another impulse. A previous art historian Alois Riegl had explained the creative impulse as a Will-to-Art (*Künstwollen*), a latent impulse independent of object or media, which manifests itself as a Will-to-Form. Riegl had come to this conclusion in reaction to the materialist theory of art, which holds that there are just three principles at play in it: purpose, resource, and technique. This latter theory is still popular among art historians. Riegl, however, saw these principles as mere restrictive factors of the Will-to-Form.

Worringer defended abstraction from an aesthetic viewpoint by stating that realist art was caused by an impulse to imitate nature (Will-to-Imitate). Such an impulse to him was a sign of mental laziness. He observed that both abstract and realist art had existed side by side in many cultures. As an example he gave the statue of the scribe (see picture) in Ancient Egypt, which existed side by side with the highly stylized art on temple walls and the pyramids.

In fact, much of religious art is highly or totally abstract. Worringer realized that what to Western eyes looks like a distortion is in fact the satisfaction of a spiritual need, and therefore also source of a particular pleasure called beauty.

The abstract and the religious are therefore connected. In the part of this article on Kandinsky and others, I will show this applies to modern abstract art as well. This is because both art and religion are an expression of one’s relationship to the universe. Worringer theorized that when one had a sense of trust in the outside world, one could easily empathize with it. It is not perceived as a threat. But what if one doesn’t trust the outside world? It should be remembered that, for much of history, nature, in the sense of wilderness, was seen as hostile and dangerous.

In Oriental thinking, this discomfort was resolved by the idea of *Maia*: the illusory nature of the outside world. This idea seldom satisfies intellectually though, and the only way to solve this in art is to eliminate the sense of space, the one salient characteristic of the outside world. Abstraction in art therefore often also involves removing an object from its surroundings, from reality, and thereby giving it a permanent quality.

Riegl also addressed the idea of absolute abstract art, which up to then mainly manifested itself in ornamental, geometric art. This sort of art, according to Riegl, gives comfort through uniformity, giving the observer a resting place from the chaos of reality. Riegl considered this the most primitive of artistic expressions. As you will read in the next section, many of Riegl's ideas would come into a lot of criticism later on.

So abstract art in a culture (like Riegl, Worringer did not consider the individual) meant a pulling away from reality (abstract comes from *ab trahere*, to pull away). It was a symptom of a culture that sees the outside world as dangerous.

Carl Gustav Jung applied Worringer's ideas to the individual. As a psychologist, he'd studied Wilhelm Wundt (founder of the first psychological institute), who'd stated that empathy was a basic element of perception, a placing a psychic value on an external object. This process was mainly subconscious. To Jung, empathy was a manifestation of extraversion. Jung was in fact the first to coin the terms *extravert-introvert*.

From Wundt's and Worringer's ideas, Jung developed the concept that through empathy one subconsciously empties the object of existence and fills it with one's own life. Through abstraction, one imposes rules on the object because one feels threatened by it, one cannot fill it with one's own life. This can also apply to the outside world in its totality. Abstraction, in such a case, becomes a form of magic. Jung saw this as an explanation of abstraction in tribal art.

With this in mind, we can look at one familiar example of modern abstract art, *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. Version O)* by Pablo Picasso, painted in 1907. Picasso had originally called it *The Brothel at Avignon*, but he could only exhibit it under the second title. Picasso had started off as a realist, though, like many, he understood photography would, in time, make it largely redundant. Yet the paintings of his Blue Period, for instance, were largely realistic. The five women in *Les Femmes d'Alger* are, however, shown heavily distorted, the three women on the right have more or less placid faces derived from ancient Iberian statues, but the two on the left have faces derived from African masks. Why did he portray prostitutes in this way? Five years before he started the painting, he'd caught a venereal disease in the brothel. A source of pleasure had suddenly become a source of pain and anxiety. So was this painting a subconscious attempt at shielding himself from the feelings he held against the Avignon girls, to exorcise them from his mind?



*Kachina dolls used by Pueblo Native Americans, these dolls are inhabited by spirits and are only given to those who can take care of them*

## Gestalt-theory

Ophthalmologist sir Harold Riley noticed something significant while treating pilots during World War II: fighter pilots who'd received fragments from their acrylic gun sights in their eyes did not develop the same level of inflammation as those who'd received glass fragments.

This discovery led him to develop the first intraocular lenses to treat people with cataracts. In 1949 these were implanted in people who'd been born with cataracts, so enabling them to see for the first time. These people, however, reported at first that they couldn't make sense of all the shapes and colors they were seeing. Two phenomena helped them to gradually make sense of the visual world: their ability to distinguish colors, and to distinguish objects from their backgrounds.

This confirmed what Gestalt-psychologists had previously hypothesized: that the detection of colors and shapes was an innate ability. This would also explain the abstractions we see in children's drawings: to draw a face, a child takes the salient characteristics of the features: the roundness of the head and eyes, the crescent shape of the mouth, and so on.

Many psychologists had been bothered by Worringer's explanation of the abstract as the manifestation of the mental values of an object to the subject, especially when it came to children's drawings. They found it hard to believe a child's mind would go through such a complex process, however subconsciously, before starting a drawing.

To Gestalt-psychologists, early mental life is entirely dependent on perceptual experiences. Also, perception to them is an active act of grasping the structure of an object, similar to understanding a word from its collection of sounds. The child draws the face as a circle, because it categorizes it as a round object. The same process, to them, also explains abstraction in tribal art.

One of the most eminent Gestalt-psychologists was Rudolf Arnheim. He wrote extensively on visual art, particularly modern art. His conclusions though, often seem to lean more in the direction of Worringer's. He made a distinction between perceptual and intellectual concepts. Van Gogh's sinuous lines when painting a cypress, for instance, were an example of a perceptual concept. The concept that develops from the medium itself is of a third kind, the representational concept. One example is the grey line produced by a pencil.



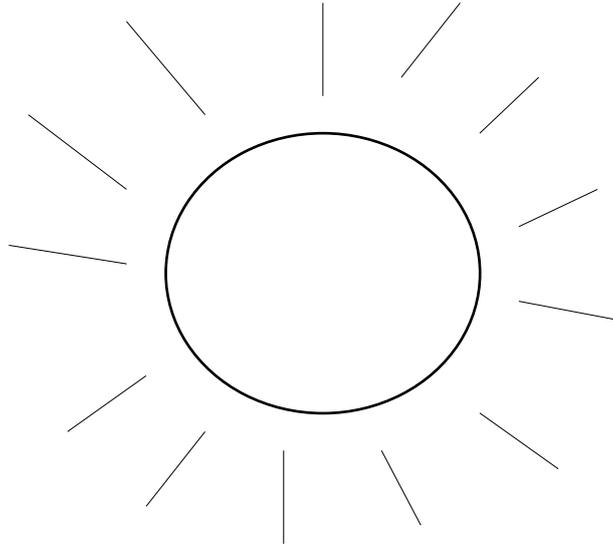
Vincent Van Gogh's Starry Night

Abstraction to Arnheim is a means through which the three concepts are unified so as to allow an individual (child) or a community to experience ever more complex intellectual processes.

In this Arnheim approaches some of Worringer's ideas. Especially when he says that art and abstraction express an attitude to life, and that it is necessary for the organisation of perceptions. This comes very close to the ideas of Carl Jung.

From this you might conclude realistic art makes no sense. So why does it exist? I have already covered Worringer's (and Jung's) viewpoint. Arnheim, and many art historians, concluded that the rise of realism went hand in hand with the rise of Science. Science needs exactitude in order to observe and measure the outside world. This need carried over into the arts.

Though Gestalt-theory offers the best explanation for children's abstract art, it cannot explain one conundrum.



Children all over the world, in all cultures, all draw the sun like this: a circle with lines projecting from it. They may observe rays poking through openings in clouds, but those do not point in all directions. Here Worringer's theory would make more sense: the child is portraying the sun's radiation of light, the idea of radiation. The moon though, is usually represented as a crescent, which is a unique characteristic under specific circumstances, so more in line with Gestalt-theory.

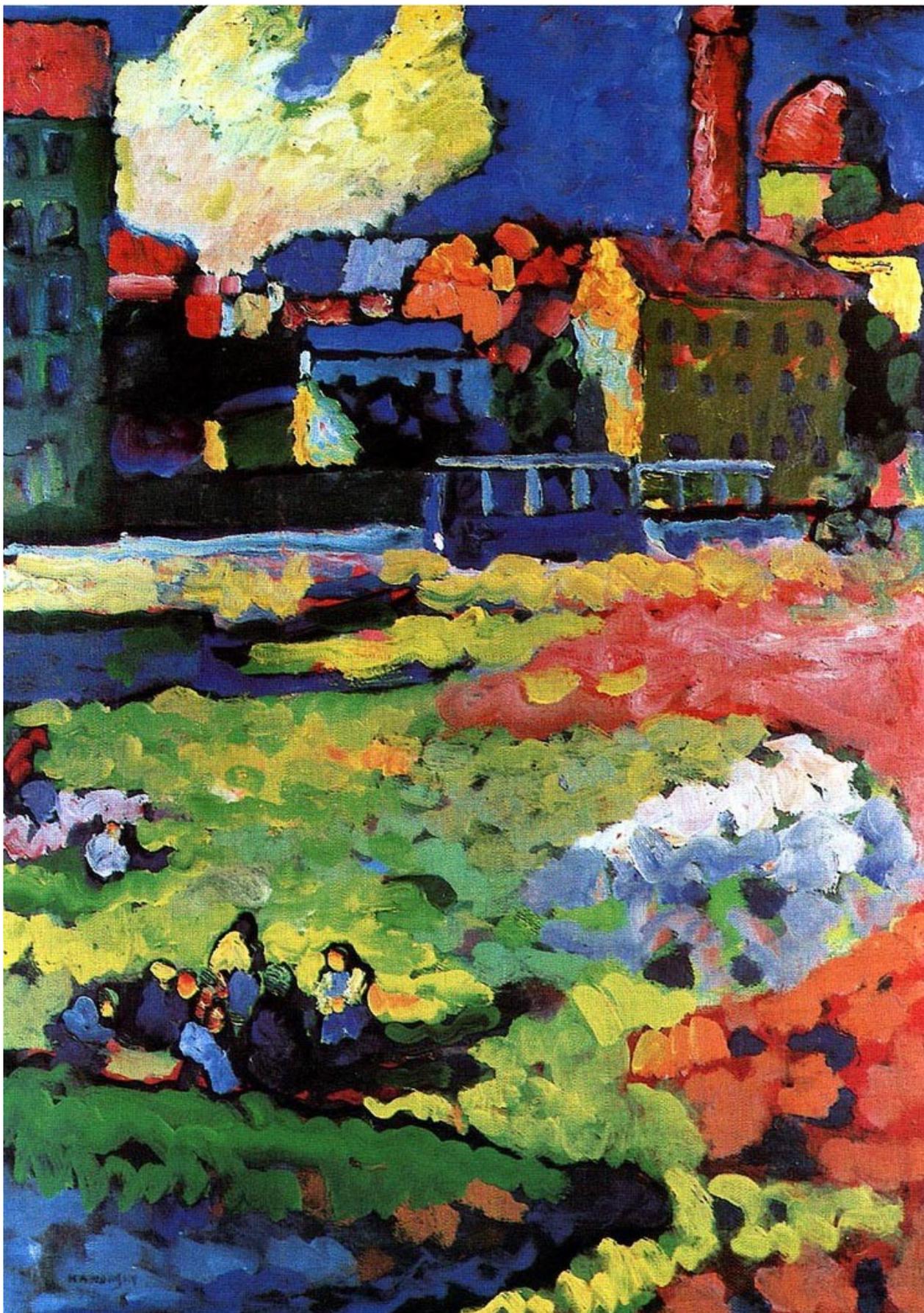
An opponent of Arnheim's ideas, and those of Worringer's as well, was the art historian Ernst Gombrich, professor of Slade Academy, London University, Harvard, and Cornell. He and Arnheim seemed to have shared a bitter rivalry, as they both mention each other by name in their lectures.

Gombrich, however, never offered a conclusion about why abstraction exists. He started from the assumption that a certain style is particular to an age. As I have shown in my introduction, however, abstract and realist art have usually existed side by side.

Another criticism was aimed at Riegl and Worringer, pointing out that Worringer's ideas ascribed certain traits to particular people and cultures, that is, realism being a mark of a strong people, and abstract of a weak. This is an oversimplification of Worringer's ideas, but Gombrich pointed out this smacks of collectivism, the lumping together of people in one entity. Riegl and Worringer also adhered to the idea of historicism: Hegel's idea that history is an inevitable progress towards an ideal. He referred to Karl Popper's *The Poverty of Historicism* in which the philosopher points out how Hegel's ideas led to the acceptance of totalitarian ideologies.



*Lazlo Moholy-Nagy, 1927*



*Wassily Kandinsky, 1908, Schwabing with Church*

## Kandinsky, Klee, and Mondrian

We've heard from art historians and psychologists, but what about the artists themselves?

Wassily Kandinsky is credited with introducing the concept of absolute abstraction into modern art. He lectured at the Bauhaus and published his ideas in *On the Spiritual in Art*. It's a very interesting work, especially if you keep in mind that he was not only a devout Russian Orthodox Christian, but also fascinated by both the Theosophic Society, led by Madame Blavatsky (and which W.B. Yeats briefly joined), and the Anthroposophical Society of Rudolph Steiner.

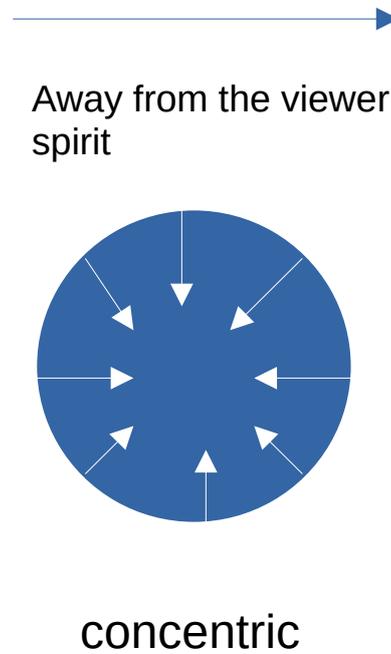
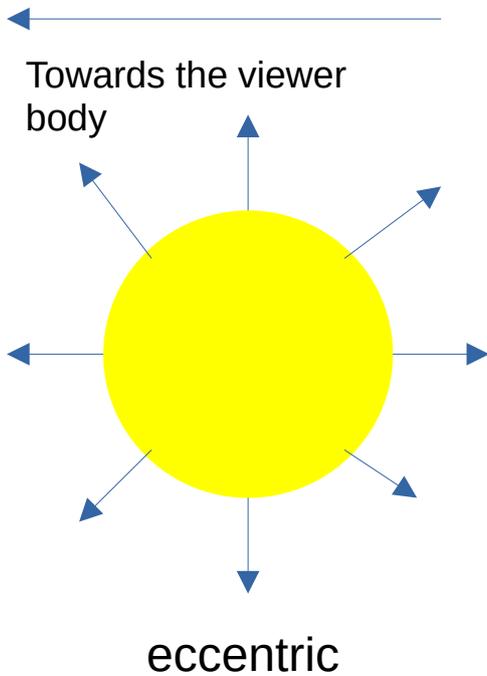
He'd studied Economics and Law at Moscow University, and later also studied Anthropology. Visiting an exhibition of Monet's paintings made him decide to become a painter. He moved to the Schwabing suburb of Munich, at the time a hive of artists, philosophers, and esoteric societies. At the academy there he also met Paul Klee.

Subsequently he toured and exhibited all over Europe. One day in 1906 he experienced a revelation. As twilight fell in his studio, Kandinsky noticed how one painting became a mysterious collection of shapes and colors. He realized then that subject-matters were blocking his artistic development.

In 1910 he formed *Der Blaue Reiter* together with the expressionists Franz Marc and August Macke, and in 1912 he published *On the Spiritual in Art*.

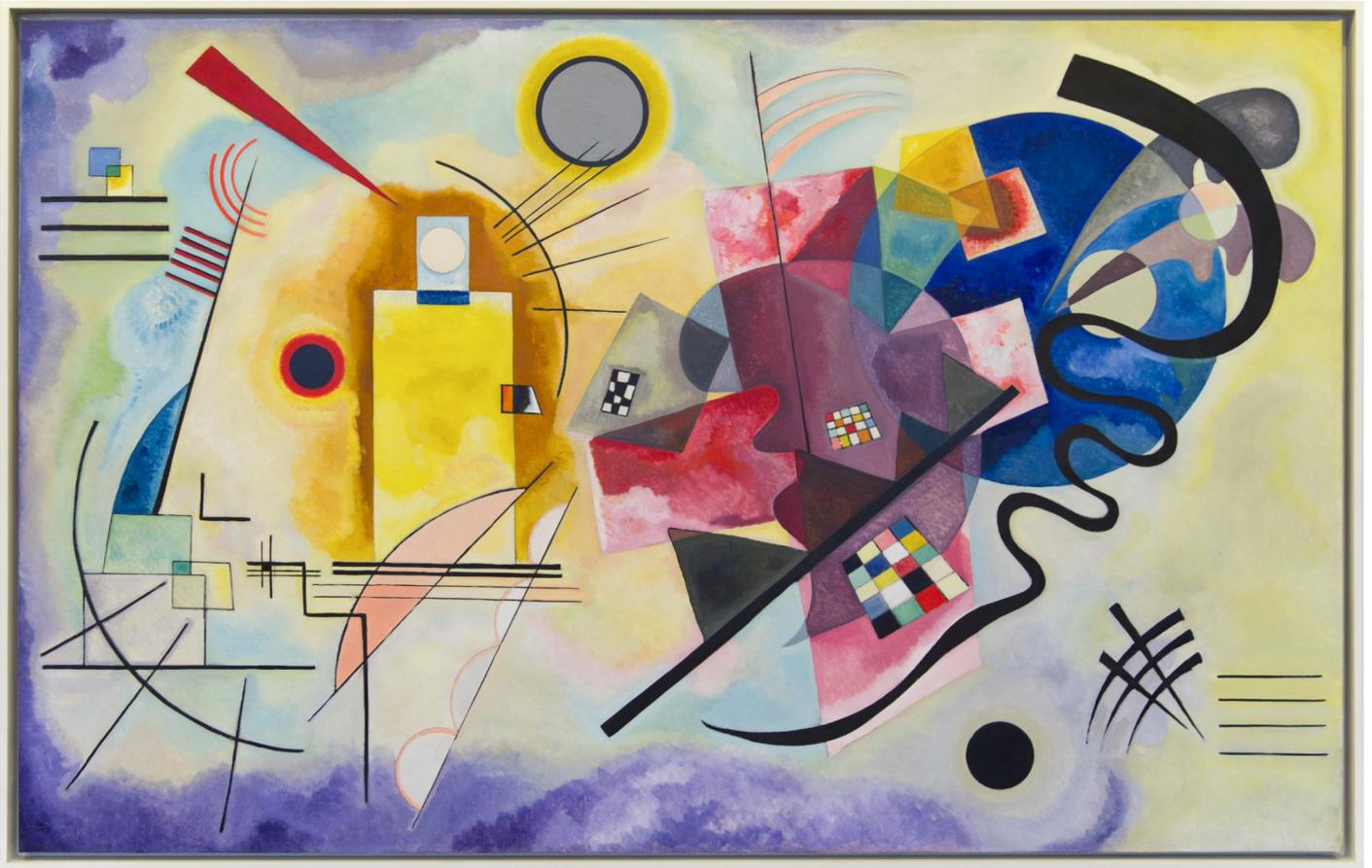
This book is particularly revealing about his intentions. In the first part he links abstraction in visual art to a revival of spirituality after the mechanistic age of the Industrial Revolution. He refers to Blavatsky and Steiner, artists like Debussy, Cezanne, and Maurice Maeterlinck. He urges viewers to look for the hidden treasures of art, that is, what lies beyond the surface appearance, and writes that such an attitude would lead mankind to ascend a spiritual pyramid.

In the second part he proposes a new way of looking at art, based on links between colors, shapes and their spiritual contents. Much of what he describes corresponds with synaesthesia: to him colors had scents and sounds. On the next page is his idea on the colors yellow and blue.



To Kandinsky, mixing the two colors would produce a sick color, a representation of raving madness.

Kandinsky returned to Russia after the Revolution to set up the Academy for Artistic Sciences. Despite the support of the Revolutionary government, he left for Germany in 1921 and in 1922 became professor at the Bauhaus, together with Paul Klee. The end of the Weimar Republic meant the end of the Bauhaus. Kandinsky moved to Paris, where he died in 1944.



*Wassily Kandinsky, Jaune, Rouge, Blue*

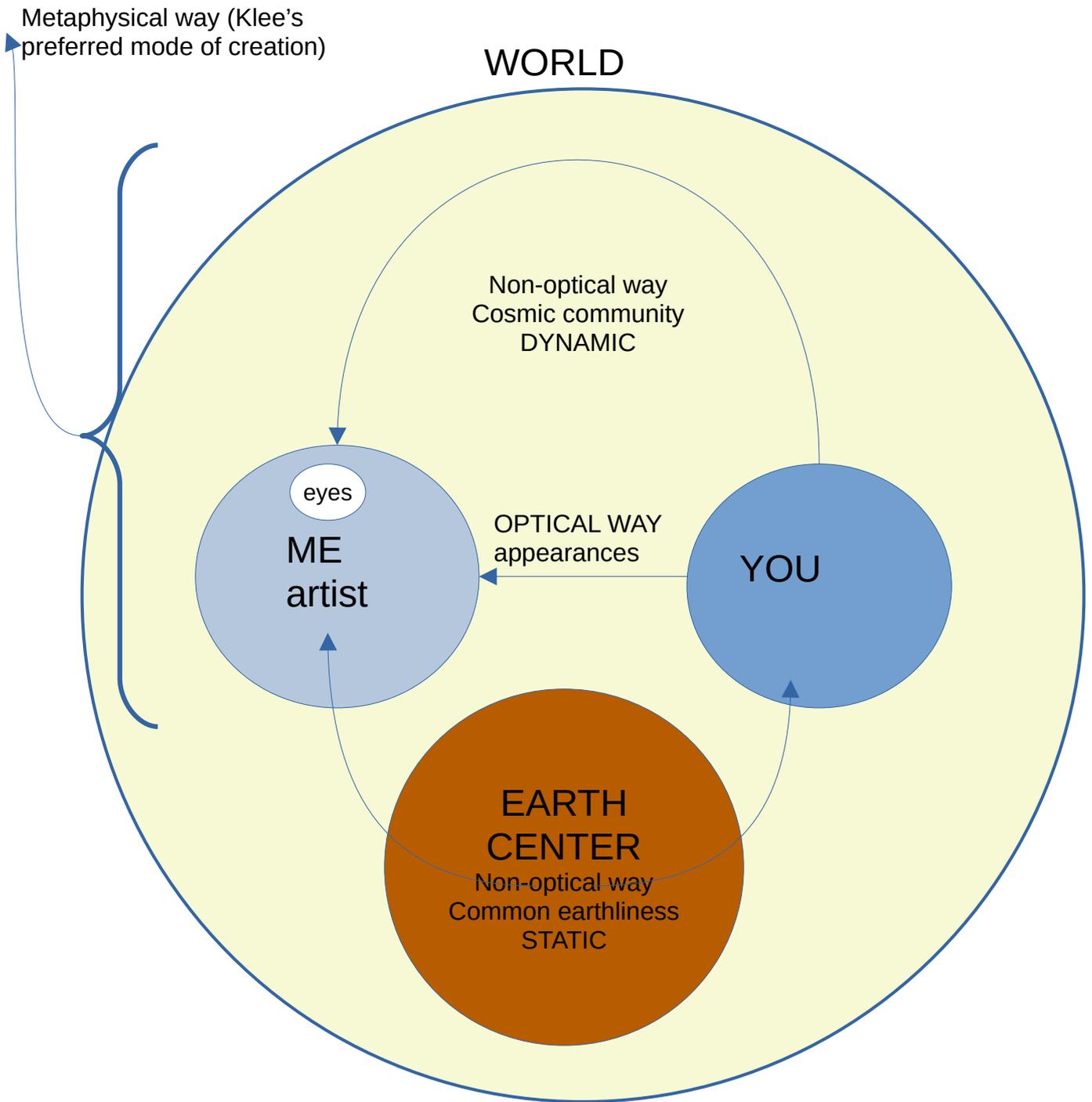
Paul Klee was born in Switzerland to a German father and a Swiss mother. To Swiss law, he was a German citizen, something that would cause him lots of problems later on. From childhood he was interested in drawing, but started off as a professional violinist.

His success at exhibitions, and meeting Kandinsky and the other artists of Der Blaue Reiter, as well as a visit to Tunis where he was struck by the Mediterranean light, made him an artist.

Because of his German citizenship, he was conscripted into the German army in 1915, though he was not sent to the front. After demobilisation, he became ever more successful and joined the Bauhaus together with Kandinsky. As a professor he was now obliged to explain his working process. While he wasn't as spiritually inspired as Kandinsky, he ascribed the creation of art to "forming powers". He also presented diagrams to explain the creative process, among them his General Theory of Creativity (a nod to Einstein's General Theory of Relativity).



*Paul Klee, Pierrot Lunaire, 1924, Honolulu Museum of Art*



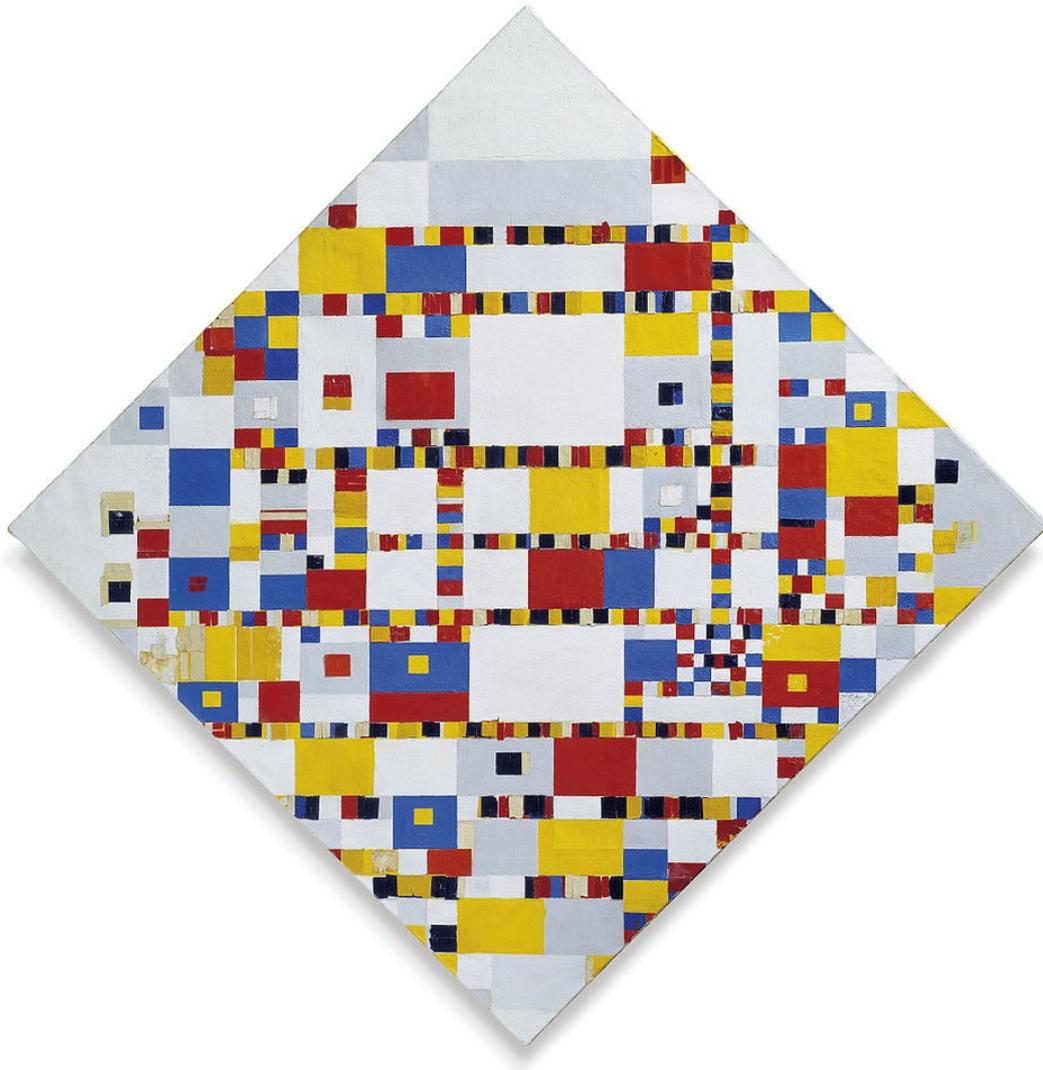
**Paul Klee's General Theory of Creativity**  
(drawn and translated from his notebooks by Peter Van Belle)

Disputes at the Bauhaus made it impossible for him to continue there, and he took up a post at the academy of Düsseldorf. He was dismissed by the nazis, who declared him Jewish. They did the same to Rudolf Steiner of the Anthroposophical Society, and the authors Gustav Meyrink and Frank Wedekind. He stayed on in Germany for a while, but then fled to Switzerland. Unfortunately the Swiss authorities gave him the cold shoulder and kept delaying his application for Swiss citizenship. It was granted the day after his death on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June 1940.

Piet Mondrian underwent a similar experience to Kandinsky in Holland during World War One. He was also a member of Blavatsky's Theosophic Society. During that war, the Netherlands remained neutral, so, though they didn't suffer the privations of occupied Belgium and France, the country was relatively isolated.

After the defeat of Germany, Mondrian moved to Paris, changed his name from the Dutch Mondriaan, and became acquainted with a group of modern artists, among them the British painter Ben Nicholson. Like Kandinsky he declared he wanted to add a spiritual dimension to his work through abstraction.

Fearing a renewed outbreak of war in 1938, he moved to Hampstead with the help of Nicholson. During the Blitz he moved to New York where he had his most successful exhibition. Among the works he displayed were those inspired by New York, among them the famous piece Broadway Boogie-Woogie. He died in 1944.



*Piet Mondrian, Victory Boogie-Woogie*

Sources article: *Abstraktion und Einfühlung*, Wilhelm Worringer, R. Piper & Co Verlag, 1921  
*Art and Illusion*, Ernst Gombrich, Phaidon Press, 1972  
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*On the Spiritual in Art*, Wassily Kandinsky, Guggenheim Foundation, 1946  
*The Artistic Ape*, Desmond Morris, Red Lemon Press, 2013  
*The Selfish Gene*, 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, Richard Dawkins, Oxford University Press, 2006  
*Paul Klee, Philosophical Vision*, McMullen Museum of Art, 2012  
Ideelart.com, online gallery and magazine  
Inverse.com, website by Emma Betuel, professor of Psychology at Columbia University

## Present-day Studies

With advances in medical technology it's become easier to test theories on abstract art. Angeline Hawley-Dolan, for instance, tested the appreciation of abstract art made by either, professional artists, children, or animals (see *The Kleksograph* issue 4 for more on art by animals). She found that test subjects preferred works by professional artists and concluded that they subconsciously perceived the artist's vision. Her results were corroborated by those of Kat Auster and Oshin Vartarian.

However, the danger with such experiments is that test subjects can see whether the work is done by a professional artist or not. Other studies, for instance, have shown that people rate works of art higher if they know they're in the collection of a museum. This can even happen subconsciously when the test subjects have previously been exposed to abstract art. Their mind automatically compares the new image with corresponding works.

Emma Betuel at Columbia University and Daphne Shohosy's experiments with eye-tracking and neuroscience led them to conclude that increased abstraction creates a psychological distance, which again would correspond to Worringer's and Jung's ideas.

Biological studies have shown the effect of stimulus intensification on both animals and humans. Both have a stronger reaction to more intense colors. In nature, for example, this is seen in the cuckoo chick, whose mouth has a more intense shade of red than those of other species. Parent birds react to it by putting more food in the cuckoo's chick's mouth, so underfeeding their own. The effect can be so great that passing birds will drop food in it on the way to their own nests. One could say a similar effect is sought after by artists.

With improvements in health care, artists are living longer, and like the rest of us, have become more susceptible to strokes and dementia. Brain scans by Arjan Chatterjee show that there's no art centre in the brain, but that brain damage can affect spatial processing to such an extent that in elderly artists this can lead to more abstraction. This phenomenon was observed in Willem de Kooning and Katherine Sherwood.

As to Color Psychology, that still largely corresponds to the ideas of Wolfgang Goethe. Warm colors provoke feelings of comfort, but fiery ones tend to induce excitement. Paintings with lots of red fetch higher prices at auctions. Yellow suggests sunshine at its most intense, but loses its power when green is added. Orange suggests energy and movement. Cool colors on the other hand, are calming, though they can also induce sadness. Light blue is perceived as refreshing and friendly, while green, of course, is associated with nature.

The 1990's saw the creation of the field of neuroaesthetics by Semir Zeki. It was discovered that abstract art stimulates parts of the brain involved with the solving of puzzles. Alex Forsythe at the University of Liverpool discovered the brain prefers a certain level of detail, a proficient artist can cause an image to reach the perfect level of detail through abstraction, without the image becoming too fractal.

These studies show how the mind reacts to abstract art at a superficial level, and Gestalt-psychologists showed how this related to perception. Yet I feel Worringer, Jung, Kandinsky, and Klee addressed how the mind created abstraction from the deeper levels of the psyche.



*Kazimir Malevich, Suprematist Composition*



*August Strindberg, Wonderland, National Museum Sweden*

# Mary Hennessey

## Wonderland

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*He was awake a long time before he remembered that his heart was broken.*

Ernest Hemingway

Papa, remembering that your heart is broken  
is different for women.

Women can eat, sleep, and drive small cars

in that rabbit hole. Sacristans of sacred time  
and gesture, an elbow  
propped on a thigh, Levis worn

to a familiar shape and then tossed like yesterday's  
newspaper—memory's a river  
and we're swimming in it.

Fathoms deep—we remember.  
Waiting for the amber light—we remember.  
The long dead wearing what

they wore in old photographs drive by and wave.  
Seeing them again makes today seem ages  
ago. Memory's a river

and we're singing in it. Near the sink  
Mama walks through the honeyed-air  
and is honeyed herself.

Fathoms deep—we remember.  
Waiting for the amber light—we remember.  
Women eat, sleep, and walk their dog

in that rabbit hole. Papa, it's different  
for women. For women there is  
no waking slow.

# Robin Fuller

## Rap Lessons

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Rappers have it easy, he thinks — bending vowels, mashing syllables together, in pursuit of rhyme. But then country singers, like Tim McGraw, can rhyme again with him. It's not the men and gin for Tim, it's all bundled, when he wants it to be — rim and hymn, with men and Spain. But rappers are not wasteful — freed from meaning (meaningfulness is a cheap move in the rappers' playbook) they stock clichés to toy with — Guilty Simpson's got hoes like firemen. She gave Nickelus F brain like a student from Yale. It doesn't matter what is being said. It's how what is being said about how what has been said before that matters. He's sick of strummers telling him about their feelings. They think if something happened to them that it's interesting because it happened to them. Of course, pop's true poet — Paul Simon — would not deny the obvious, child, no more than he would deny the obvious-child. But Lil Ugly Mane can take the latter route, rope around his neck and kick the ladder out. Chinese rapping must be amazing.

These were the thoughts that spun through and absorbed him, until the warm cling of pyjamas on his thigh splashed him into the present. Fuck, he chirps, as he yellows the seat, the tiles and his toes. He throws a hand towel on the ground, stands on it, and does a lethargic James Brown shuffle.

Suddenly, but also slowly, all goes black. He feels heavy and spinning, as if on a round up. He holds onto the towel rack and concentrates. The world reopens its watered eyes. He should think about his sons — Mikey, eight, and Seán, ten. He needs to change. They say a change gonna come like Obama'n'dem say — as Vince Staples put it — but they shooting e'ryday round my momma'n'dem way. Masterful. Stop. Sighing. He's not learning lessons. Was it just today that he brought Seán and Mikey to the market? From his dry leg he notices the weight of a naggin. Jameson. This goddamn case, he affects as he sips, shaking his head. He's 'a police'. He likes that, 'police' as singular noun. Better still a 'murder police' — I'm a murder police. A murder police working on a drugs case. And also, a father. He finally gets some time with the boys and what happens?

He finds crumbled fragments of a blue pill, once the shape of a ghost, stuck to the base of the bottle, and thinks about Mac Dre. In fact, he thinks of Rydah J. Klyde in Mac Dre's 'Giggin'. A deceptively simple lyric, 'what you know about thizz? / What I know about this? / Naw bitch thizz'. Klyde swaps the voicing from the first consonant to the last, pointing out the symmetry in the near homonyms, this and thizz. The crumbs taste recognisably bitter.

How could he have known Stringer would be at the market? And how could he let the opportunity pass? He shakes his head again and winces through another sip. Against all odds, he admires his reflection, smiles at himself, an inside joke. He closes his eyes and pictures the scene in soft NTSC. The 'spy game', Mikey the front, Sean the follow, sandwiching their mark. He opens the bathroom door as if turning a corner at the market, a

handheld camera leading him from front, cutting to belly button's eye shots of ambling consumers. Where are the boys?

A slow panic. From the far end of the hall he hears Lyrics Born say '... life and total devastation', as he slumps against the wall, slapping fruitlessly for the lightswitch. He sits, spinning again, as Lateef the Truthspeaker raps in nasal doubletime about the end of the world. He now sees himself, the actual him, in NTSC colouring — shot from above, he sits with his back against the wall, his hands gripping the carpet. He emits a detached laugh. He gropes his way back to the front room, which flashes like a sedated disco — a narrow cone of blue dust overhead and the glow of the elliptical DVD logo, as it slowly pongs off the perimeters defined by the projector. He lowers himself onto the couch, back into the donut he has made of the duvet. At arm's length a joint still embers and, smelling of singed plastic, melts into silence a sentence reading — 'From, David Simon, creator and co—'. Youtube autoplay has found its way to Blackalicious, 'A Forty Ounce for Breakfast'. Not a bad idea, he falls asleep.

# Martin Ferguson

## Tanagra in Black

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*after Don Paterson*

O petite tigress, long had he supposed  
you had evaporated in a cloud of dust.

'Who is this magicienne  
who manifests her own phantasm,  
sculpts living statues from light and shadow ?'

Shadow, the territory of your apparition  
from where all form emerges..

You make a pact with light,  
suspend time in the essential moment

your chambre argentique, your sourceress's  
alchemic box of silver halide crystal.

The skin of your subjects gashed, slashed and scarred

– you do not hesitate to use the paradoxical artifice,  
of theatre –

the fleeting nature of their expression,  
skins of your models, coated in earthly matter –

ashes, clay, sand or mud,, your hands  
Caudel's, tailor from breathing human stone.

You reveal voices of your idols,  
from whispers of the river Ilisos

from Phidias, sculptor of the statue of Zeus,  
from the rage of Bernini.

Your oeuvre forms a singular force,  
a dangerous combat of existence,  
in which subsisting is perpetual resurrection.

Far from any easy aestheticism, you speak  
from the essence of every living being.

Your work is a journey,  
you tirelessly carve  
a passionate reflection

that drives us to feel the age old struggle  
against obliteration –  
some audacious synthesis !

I will not mislead myself with the false  
assumption, that there is hope for us both,

though I admit to having built  
a short written position,  
in defence of my belief

– aware though I am of time's conspiracy –

A finer ageing Orsippus of Megara,  
you will never meet.

*for E.L.*

# Martin Ferguson

## Testimony

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We were a jilted steamer in late winter,  
sitting out the night on glacial smooth water,

when first time we caught eye of her,  
decorating the sea with her fragrance and beauty.

She shimmered like a bejewelled mirage,  
so close, we could smell the Guerlain in her smoke.

We saw she was having the whale of her life,  
her nighttime fireworks were celebratory.

She'd swept off our warnings with halcyon youth,  
we just wanted to join in her soirée party,

though how were we to know her music  
was nearer her god, a prevised requiem.

We could scent the ice in her gin martinis,  
but must have misread her excessive boozing,

her jazz singer's smeared ink mascara,  
as crocodile cries and buoyant juvenescence,

unaware as we were, of her bow starboard flaws,  
her loose underpinning, her blistered slipshod steel.

And then she just vanished, in plain view of us –  
oblivious, to the playful hoodwinks in our morse.

*SS Californian*

(editor: the SS Californian was the closest ship to the sinking Titanic, but did not intervene.)

# Ian C. Smith

## Circumstances

---

I dislodge my wall clock, batteries skating across tiles. Replacing the despot on its hook, second-hand active again, I remember visiting a pal in the old neighbourhood of our teeming city, its familiar smell. He spoke like a movie gangster, had a wife, toddlers in winter pyjamas in rented rooms. Though we were all so young then, I yearned for family warmth, emptiness an ache.

My clock still works, but in reverse. Travelling absurdly through time past, after an hour nine o'clock is now eight. On that so long ago visit my pal's teenaged sister was staying with them. Something odd about her, manic. She flirted hotly with me in front of her brother and my girlfriend, lust infusing the room like incense, me uneasy.

That clock conjures fantasy: a journey of enlightenment, into the labyrinth, age to youth, reliving shadows swaying through long languid nights on slow-moving trains, ferries' foghorns, from destination to embarkation, laughter's music, love crying out, sharp to soft. I moved, lost touch with that pal in life's buzz, married my girlfriend, made our own toddlers. Like that friendship, our union didn't last. Wails of distress. Wild creatures. Outrageous drama. Shame lingering.

Neither I nor my crazy clock making much sense now, I am stuck with old and clumsy, pondering other, less than ideal, aspects of time-travel. That visit already sliding into the abyss of forgetting, I read some years later of a killing resulting from a hullabaloo at a party. A man I once knew aimed a rifle at his wildly flirting sister.

The present tethered to the past, however stretched, I recall he threatened, she taunted him to go ahead. He got off lightly, pleading posturing gone awry, needed his clock to run backwards. Was it unintentional in the end? Who knows? His tendon crooking only a little more in one insane moment. Thinking back, how unreal reading about this seemed. The shock then. His trembling claw flexing that trigger.

Mocked by a clock, my enthusiasm for the irretrievable past wanes. Larded with nothing happening again and again, the dark halls of memory grow ever fainter, even grief's clarity: his outrage, our connection, that strange girl in her grave these long years. We survive, but life's fragility, the turns it can take, leaves some families crushed by havoc wrought, hounded by a wan melancholia as time sweeps on.

# Ian C. Smith

## Hello?

---

I jerk upright, awakened by a close voice. Its eerie echo rings through my silent awareness. Leaving the light off, the light I read by when jangled nerves defeat sleep, I sidle from sheets, my thoughts, combative and fugitive, electric. A man's *sotto voce*, intimate, smoothly spoken, Hello? After that, nothing. I steal past walls, wardrobe, opened doors, picking up my ready boots, keys, wallet, on the way. An intruder? Not inside my bedroom as first thought. Beyond the window? This middle of the day awake in the middle of the night is nothing new.

Earlier, I exercised in scoured light, tattoos covered, running rain-logged streets, wheeling abrupt 360s, scanning, always thinking, always, as I do on each haphazardly changed route, sometimes imagining my body's chalked outline fenced by witches' hats. Easing the front door open, I hold my breath. Empty footpaths. No different parked vehicles. Scrunched scoria leading to the back yard would announce nocturnal visitors, so too, strategic chimes on the side gate. Boots on, I tread softly, feeling I waste my time, time short now, mind a dark sermon. So much for tiptoeing too far on the wild side.

No shadow shifts. No sound, not a sob. Unlocking the back door, I re-enter my lone existence, senses stretched. Bedroom window shut, it had to be inside. In this utter stillness I feel no-one was here. My unfinished jigsaw puzzle, a man outside a whitewashed cottage by a fragrant harbour fondling a dog's soft ears, sits on the table. He probably jokes with folk at the local inn, gathers accoutrements. My few photographs they told me not to take, mostly kept unseen, stare accusingly in the street lamps' reflected refulgence.

That voice still a flirtatious earworm, its suave tone encouraging now, I log on, too awake to rest. Checking emails, these severely restricted, my mind wanders to when I tangoed, when beginnings never knew endings, sifting memory for joy when my name was different. Gravid with guilt, I cede to logic, wishing with savage hope to trawl back what prowled my dreams – night dreams my salon now, the abandoned, some faceless – when I shattered fitful sleep talking aloud, long to see once more who was greeted when I said, Hello?

# Sam Barbee

## There

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copperhead on straw beside sidewalk breach.

riptide conjoins slow pools across beach.

first steps everywhere; first steps toward blue.

our cold center shares trinkets and paper.

reveals paces of lost maps to treasure.

truth buried, subdued; lies buried, subdued.

mock my next word to set forth argument.

disprove love transfuses; whitewash parchment.

offer gray wish-wash; dark karma concludes.



# CONTRIBUTORS

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**Félicien Rops**, (1833-1898) Symbolist painter and illustrator.

**Gary Bolick** is a native of North Carolina, where he now lives with his wife Jill. He lived and studied in Paris and Dijon for a year and a half before graduating from Wake Forest.

At Wake he studied under and was mentored by Germaine Bree, who was very supportive of his writing and interests in surrealism and Carl Jung's work on the collective unconscious.

He has published three novels. The latest being: *A WALKING SHADOW* (Unsolicited Press) published 2018.

Among **David Radavich's** poetry collections are a pair of epics, *America Bound* (2007) and *America Abroad* (2019), as well as *Middle-East Mezze* (2011) and *The Countries We Live In* (2014). His forthcoming book is *Unter der Sonne / Under the Sun: German Poems from Deutscher Lyrik Verlag*.

**Bruach Mhor** lives by a loch, loves sea gooseberries. His poems have most recently appeared in anthologies from Dreich Press and in *Black Box Manifold*, *The Journal*, *Dream Catcher*, *The Interpreter's House*, *Cerasus*.

**Umberto Boccioni**, (1882-1916) Futurist painter and sculptor.

**Phil Wood** was born and lives in Wales. He studied English Literature at Aberystwyth University. He has worked in statistics, education, shipping, and a biscuit factory. His writing can be found in various publications, including: *Fevers of the Mind*, *London Grip*, *Autumn Sky Daily*, *The Ink Pantry*, and *The Klecksograph*.

**Peter Van Belle** is the editor of *The Klecksograph* and has published poems and short stories in Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Canada, the US, and Belgium. As a child he lived in the US, but now he lives in Belgium.

**Mary Henessy** has been a nurse most of her adult life. She returned to school late and fell in with a community of generous, word-crazed people. Her poems have appeared in many journals and anthologies. Poetry is the only thing that makes sense to her anymore.

**Robin Fuller** is from Dublin, Ireland. His short story 'Chinese Whispers' appeared in the Summer 2020 issue of *The Stinging Fly*. He has a PhD in semiotics and typography and has previously published non-fiction on these topics.

**Martin Ferguson** is a poet and English language teacher working in France. He has been published in several UK poetry magazines including *The Journal and Ink Sweat and Tears*, and shortlisted in *Against The Grain Press*. His debut collection *An A to Z Art of Urban Survival Following Diogenes of Sinope* is available now through Original Plus

<https://sites.google.com/site/samsmiththejournal/home/original-plus-chapbooks>

**Ian C Smith**'s work has been published in *Antipodes*, *BBC Radio 4 Sounds*, *The Dalhousie Review*, *Griffith Review*, *San Pedro River Review*, *Southword*, *The Stony Thursday Book*, & *Two Thirds North*. His seventh book is *wonder sadness madness joy*, Ginninderra (Port Adelaide). He writes in the Gippsland Lakes area of Victoria, and on Flinders Island.

**Sam Barbee** has a new collection, *Uncommon Book of Prayer* (2021, Main Street Rag). His previous poetry collection, *That Rain We Needed* (2016, Press 53), was a nominee for the Roanoke-Chowan Award as one of North Carolina's best poetry collections of 2016. His poems have appeared recently *Poetry South*, *Literary Yard*, *Asheville Poetry Review*, and *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, among others; plus on-line journals *American Diversity Report*, *Exquisite Pandemic*, *Verse Virtual*, *The Voices Project*, and *Medusa's Kitchen*.

He was awarded an "Emerging Artist's Grant" from the Winston-Salem Arts Council to publish his first collection *Changes of Venue* (Mount Olive Press); has been a featured poet on the North Carolina Public Radio Station WFDD; received the 59th Poet Laureate Award from the North Carolina Poetry Society for his poem "The Blood Watch"; and is a two-time Pushcart nominee.

# END OF ISSUE SEVEN OF THE KLEKSOGRAPH



*Paul Klee, Ships in Darkness*