

MEMORY  
KLEE, PROUST AND MYSELF

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to describe memory through the words of Paul Klee, Marcel Proust and my own, in a structure similar to the operations of memory. The paper is directed in the first person, utilizing metaphor, and yes, it is written to be confusing and yet intriguing. Paul Klee's painting "Carpet of Memory" prompted these ideas and I think, give us an understanding of the artist and ourselves.

Whatever life may be, it is experience and from these experiences come memories. (1)

Life is a journey; it is a passage through time...I have studied this world of variety and have, I suppose, unobtrusively found my way in it. My sense of direction has brought order into the passing stream of images and experience. This sense of direction in nature and life, this branching out and spreading array, I shall compare with the root of a tree. From the root the sap flows to me, flows through me, flows to my eye. Thus I stand as the trunk of the tree. Battered and stirred by the strength of the flow, I mold my vision into my work. As in full view of the world, the crown of the tree unfolds and spreads in time and in space, so with my work. (2)

To spy on grazing buffalo and playful prairie dogs, to stare up at the walk through luscious foliage of green, to catch the changing colors of a canyon's wonders, to play innocently in the ruins of Indians past, to feel the pleasures of a serene river, to touch nature. This was my childhood in the National Parks of Roosevelt, Blue Ridge Mountains, Grand Canyon, Mesa Verde, Chatahoochee. My influences from nature run deep. (3)

And when I awoke in the middle of the night, not knowing where I was, I did not even know at first who I was; I had only in its primal simplicity a sense of existing, such as my flicker in the depths of an animal's consciousness; I was more destitute than the cave-dweller. I have slept too long. I no longer exist. My waking is barely felt, mechanically and without consciousness... . (4)

My earliest memory of making art was when I pressed my hand into a tray of wet plaster, my first experience of making concrete, my signature....of all that I was. (5)

The very words I use to describe the world revealed by memory apply as well to the world of art. Both are real and ideal without being actual and abstract. In both, persons and places are present as images but absent as actual things. Because both worlds are virtual, they affirm the true existence of reality while at the same time revealing its essence. The world redesigned and rendered virtually by memory is, of course, redesigned again by art, for art alone can order and give an expressive form to the images that memory has extracted from life. (6)

Art does not reproduce the visible; it renders visible. (6½)

I am a product of my family, where musical harmony flowed, where travel and mobility were inevitable,....fantasy -- imagination, imagination -- playful, playful -- whimsical, whimsical -- fantasy, fantasy -- metaphor, metaphor -- imagination, imagination -- mystery, mystery -- reality, reality -- memory, memory -- fantasy... . (7)

The function of art is to liberate us from the prison of the actual world by converting things into images. This conversion can take place only within the 'soul'. Unlike habit and forgetfulness that allow us to escape suffering but blind us to its truth, art gives us knowledge of suffering and of the real world. For both the artist and viewer this knowledge is a source of joy. (8)

I can measure the resistance, I can hear the echo of great spaces traversed...resisting softness of this interposed atmosphere which has the same expanse as our life and which is the whole poetry of memory. (9)

I must go on seeking! I have found parts but not the whole! I still lack the ultimate power, for: the people are not with us. But I seek a people. I began over there in the Hauhaus. I began there with a community to which each one of us gave what he had. More we cannot do. (10)

Where dinner was served every night with the whole family together, where Sundays were family days and bread baking days,... . (11)

I am conscious of the fact that art should be a means of communication. I also feel that through creation the artist learns to recognize the world in which he exists and acts, it is according to the extent of his own experience. (12)

Presumptuous is the artist who does not follow his road through to the end. But chosen are those artists who penetrate to the region of that secret place where primeval power nurtures all evolution. There, where to powerhouse of all time and space -- call it brain or heart of creation -- activates every function; who is the artist whose world does not dwell there? In the womb of nature, at the source of creation, where the secret key to all lies guarded. But not all can enter. Each should follow where the pulse of his own heart leads. But our pounding heart drives us down, deep down to the source of all. What springs from this source -- fantasy -- we must go on seeking it! (13)

Memory...nothingness out of which, from time to time, a similitude lets us draw, resuscitated, dead remembrances. (14)

I don't remember when I decided I needed to make art, it just seemed inevitable and it eventually became my language of communication. I have a record of time and those memories will always remain. (15)

Where Dad played his role of the breadwinner and Mom her role as housewife and mother,... . (16)

I do not believe in the beauty of life because I do not remember it, but if perchance I smell an old fragrance, I feel elated; likewise I think I no longer love the dead, but this is because I do not remember them; if once again I see an old glove, I dissolve into tears, upheld by a grace or a flower stalk of remembrance. (17)

I savor a taste of irony in his visual puns, and my eyes become engrossed in the intricacies of line and color through the images Klee projects. His forms lie flat on the surface of the painting, and yet they suggest mysterious depths and complex relationships. Step by step, the simple, childlike marks develop into a fantasy world of many layers, full of strange actions and suggestions of meaning. (18)

Klee's art may be described as a form of poetic metaphor, a system of private signs that strive to attain universal meanings. (19)

The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step... . (20)

An hour is not merely an hour. It is a vase filled with perfumes, sounds, plans and climates. What I call reality is a certain relationship between these sensations and the memories which surround me at the same time. (21)

Where divorce became real after twenty years of marriage,... . (22)

I think, must the world appear to those who do not stand apart from it and contemplate it from outside; to those who see it from the inside, with its infinite prospects, its diverging paths which cross, wheel round, then open slowly along the apparently capricious curves of life's papabola; a world ever eccentric and peripheral, 'irregular', yet nevertheless secretly obedient to certain laws, and ever striving to develop in order

to find its path and break through to reality. (18)

Space and time are simultaneously subjective and objective; for this reason the sequence of values is endless and each value is not permanently bound to the object, but to the existence of the object in this or that point of space and time. It is bound to the recollection of its having been, to the possibility of its future being, under completely different conditions of space and time. The object itself has no certainty; it might have been and might be no longer; it might not be, but might be going to be. Since it is, ultimately, only a meeting of co-ordinate lines, a luminous point in the dark expanse of possible space and time, it could change into another object, whose trajectory may come to pass through that point. Should the unforeseeable parabola of our life pass through that point it could be that we might 'become' that object. Reality is a never-ending metamorphosis. (23)

Where education and health is stressed... . (24)

Everything around me sinks away and my work comes into being as if by itself. (25)

The problem of being good and pleasing to others has gotten in the way from doing what I need to do. I was always the good child, helping others, very mature and grown-up. I think I wasn't given the chance to go through problems and react like a child, to throw fits, cry, yell. Now my reactions feel artificial, I can't confront people with my real feelings, I have found it easier to play the martyr which eventually ends up hurting myself and everyone around me, and yet I continue. Art allows me to open up and be me or as much of me as I am allowing myself to be. (26)

We make little use of our experience, we leave unachieved in the summer dusk or the precocious nights of winter the hours in which it had seemed to me that there might nevertheless be contained some element of tranquility or pleasure. But those hours are not altogether lost. When, in their turn, come and sing to me fresh moments of pleasure which by themselves would pass by equally slender and linear, the others bring to them the ground, the solid consistency of a rich orchestration. (27)

To be creative means to experience life in one's own way, to perceive from one's own person, to draw upon one's own resources, capacities, roots. It means facing life directly, honestly, meeting eye to eye, fact to face, self to self. It means searching, discovering, becoming aware through one's own deliberation, struggle, conflict, and inner solitude. (28)

Where sibling support is life saving, where successes and failures are treated with care,...Journeys have been an essential part of my life. That instinct to travel continues. One of my strongest memories is my study in Italy, in the summer of 1980. I was bombarded with great art, new cultures, new languages, and new ideas about life. (29)

"Carpet of Memory" is fragmented, multi-leveled, complex, overlapping with translucencies created in rickly ambiguous space. The framework of horizontals, verticals, and diagonals describe a sophisticated statement. The graphic "X" signs, triangles, circles, grid forms form a kind of universal vocabulary of memories. There are combined, two extremes of effects; the physicality of a heavily textures surface with the quality of a transparently colored grid. The overall effect is true to its idea; a dreamlike arena, where bits and pieces of Tunisian detail



lift and submerge themselves coloristically over a sandcolored background. The flat physical surface of the picture plane, like an ancient discolored wall, is emphatically stated by the plaster texture. Like a light warm cloud or indeterminate dream space the background color appears to float in ever-changing spatial relationships among the graphic signs. Thus, every element of "Carpet of Memory" contributes to its richness of space. Firmly fixed in a balanced surface scaffolding, the forms of the painting are inflected by color and texture into a passage space of complexity. (30)

Where coming back together is special, where respect and love run high,... . (31)

My Tunisian trip, a three week journey to North Africa, affected me and my art significantly; Easter Sunday, 4:12 St. Bermain...the evening is deep inside me forever. Many a blonde, northern moonrise, like a muted reflection, will softly remind me, and remind me again and again. It will be my bridge, my alter ego, an incentive to find myself. I, myself, am the moonrise of the South. Thursday, 4:16 Kairuan...I now abandon my work. It penetrates so deeply and so gently into me, I feel it and it gives me confidence in myself without effort. Color possesses me. I don't have to pursue it. It will possess me always. I know it. That is the meaning of this happy hour: Color and I are one. I am a painter. This journey had a long lasting effect on me, increasing the importance of color in my work. Simultaneously the trip was decisive in stimulating my sense of romanticism and fantasy. From this point on, exotic, orientalizing motifs, titles and forms appear with great frequency. (32)

I feel I understand Klee's journey. I have just finished an exciting journey to the Virgin Islands, a fantasy for me, come true. I came back to my studio with a new fervor and energy to create. The colors and images are fanciful and reminiscent of my experience in that unbelievably beautiful place. (33)

...Between my present state and the memory that suddenly comes back to me...there is such a wide distance that fact alone, regardless even of any specific individuality, would suffice to make comparison between them impossible. Yet, if, thanks to our ability to forget, a past recollection has been able to avoid any tie, any link with the present moment, its isolation in the depths of a valley or on the tip of a mountain peak, it suddenly brings me a breath of fresh air -- refreshing just because I have breathed it once before -- of that purer air -- which could not convey that profound sensation of renewal if it had not already been breathed; for the only true paradise is always the paradise we have lost. (34)

The adoption of Cubist composition took place along two lines of development: one more planar in form and one more linear. Of the two, the linear is more related to the immediate past, the Tunisian journey. Cubism in shape, passage and composition was a possession of complete, coherent, and extremely flexible visual language for me in late 1914. (35)

I don't recall exactly when I questioned the meaning of art. Passively I listened to the art professor's ideas, it wasn't until I was making art and writing about it that I came to some conclusion. For me the inherent elements in creating art is the embodiment of idea, life and spirit into a form. Creating art is the seeking of truth. The

attainment of the essence of things can only be achieved through the active participation and extreme tension of subjectivity. Life, art, and spirituality are processes of understanding, hence the precious vital part of man. (36)

Whether we realize it or not, we are in a process of testing our beliefs through our conduct and our conduct through our beliefs. (37)

I was born with a companion, my twin sister, Laureen. She is a part of that vital core in me. Our spirits can never be separated. (38)

My first impression of Klee's "Carpet of Memory" was that it seemed to be a passage through life. It seemed somewhat muffled and fragmented, unclear in direction. The painting for me took on a life of its own. It breathed. (39)

Memory...nothingness out of which, from time to time, a similitude lets me down, resuscitated, dead remembrances. (39)

What we suppose to be our love, our jealousy, are, neither of them, single, continuous and individual passions. They are composed of an infinity of successive loves, of different jealousies, each of which is ephemeral, although by their uninterrupted multitude they give us the impression of continuity, the illusion of unity. The goal of this is to make the painting into a living essence. (40)

It was as though my only link with things was through memory. The most insignificant gesture, the simplest act remains enclosed, as it were, in a thousand sealed jars, each filled with things of an absolutely different color, and temperature. Furthermore, these jars, ranged along all levels of our by-gone years -- years during which we have been constantly changing, if only in our dreams and thoughts -- stand at different altitudes and gives us the impression of strangely varied atmospheres. (41)

"Carpet of Memory" is a crystallization of things experienced, things which have grown, things which have been made, things which are known and things which are not known. (42)

Tremendous fragments of meaning. (43)

And yet, standing at my appointed place, at the trunk of the tree, I do nothing other than gather and pass on what comes to me from the depths. My position is humble, and the beauty of the crown is not my own. I am merely a channel. (44)

## CONCLUSION

This paper was written as a journey of memories in which I began to experience the understanding of Klee and his painting, "Carpet of Memory" and myself. Through studying Klee I found self discovery inevitable.

Proust's writing stands alone. He utilizes metaphor in words not unlike Klee, in painting. They both strive for fantasy and illusion in their work, through which magic results.

I found that by utilizing the first person, cohesion was achieved and the feelings of the ideas were brought closer, as if I had written and experienced them myself. This structural tool I feel aided in the attainment of a closer relationship to the ideas brought forward.

I found that I had to eliminate a great deal of important ideas about Klee, Proust and myself. This paper would go on forever if I did not place limits on it just as our memories continues without limits. Our brain stores an incredible amount of information, but we chose to remember certain things which may become more important through time, thus the information changes and we get caught in misconceptions or are they really misconceived? The real situation changes through time but so do we and our ideas. Which is real - our memories?

I feel that the structure of the paper may be confusing but it comes together because as 'thinking' readers we force connection and understanding even if it doesn't quite make sense, or does it?

## END NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Herbert, Robert, *Modern Artists on Art*, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, c. 1929, p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>Verdi, Richard, *Klee and Nature*, Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., New York, c. 1984, p. 28.

<sup>3</sup>Feneš, Sandy, a memory, 1986.

<sup>4</sup>Girard, Reneš, *Proust, A Collection of Essays*, Prentice Hall, Inc., Englewood Cliffs, N.J., c. 1962, p. 150.

<sup>5</sup>Feneš, 1986.

<sup>6</sup>Stambolian, George, *Proust and the Creative Encounter*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, c. 1972, p. 203.

<sup>7</sup>Lazzaro, Gualtieri, *San Klee, A Study of His Life and Work*, Translated from Italian by Stuart Hood, Frederick H. Praeger Publishers, New York, c. 1957, p. 105.

<sup>8</sup>Feneš, 1986.

<sup>9</sup>Stambolian, p. 204.

<sup>10</sup>Girard, p. 73.

<sup>11</sup>Geelhaar, Christian, *Paul Klee and the Bauhaus*, New York Graphic Society Ltd., New York, c. 1973, pp. 17-20.

<sup>12</sup>Feneš, 1986.

<sup>13</sup>Spiller, Jurg, *Paul Klee, The Thinking Eye*, George Wittenburg, Lund Humphries, London, translated by Ralph Manheim, c. 1961, p. 13.

<sup>14</sup>Geelhaar, pp. 17-20.

<sup>15</sup>Girard, p. 173.

<sup>16</sup>Fene; 1986.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Girard, p. 162.

<sup>19</sup>Michael, J. A., *Introduction to Human Memory*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, Evanston, and London, c. 1970, p. 9.

<sup>20</sup>Jordan, Jim M. *Paul Klee and Cubism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, c. 1984, pp. 3-7.

<sup>21</sup>Wallis, Charles L., *Lao-Tse, The Treasure Chest*, Harper & Row Publishers, New York, Philadelphia, London, c. 1965, p. 231.

<sup>22</sup>Stambolian, p. 217.

<sup>23</sup>Fene; 1986.

<sup>24</sup>Spiller, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup>Fene; 1986.

<sup>26</sup>Spiller, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup>Fene; 1986.

<sup>28</sup>Girard, p. 163.

<sup>29</sup>Fene; 1986.

<sup>30</sup>Jordan, pp. 51-67.

<sup>31</sup>Fene; 1986.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Geelhaar, p. 28.

<sup>34</sup>Fene; 1986.

<sup>35</sup>Fowlie, Wallace, *A Reading of Proust*, 2nd ed., The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, c. 1963, pp. 218-222.

<sup>36</sup>Feneš, 1986.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Morris, Van Cleve and Pai, Young, *Philosophy and the American School*, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, c. 1976, p. 6.

<sup>39</sup>Feneš, 1986.

<sup>40</sup>Girard, p. 173.

<sup>41</sup>Jordan, p. 55.

<sup>42</sup>Girard, p. 172.

<sup>43</sup>Jordan, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup>Feneš, 1986.

<sup>45</sup>Herbert, pp. 76-82.



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