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THE PERFORMATIVE TURN IN THE VISUAL ARTS. THE ART OF PAUL KLEE

Abstract: The 1970s saw the emergence of the performative turn in many areas of the humanities. Although its most important representatives emphasized that it did include visual arts, specific examples were usually limited to action art phenomena, bordering on performance art, painting, or sculpture. This article is an attempt to demonstrate that the performative approach to art can be traced back to the avant-garde movement of the first half of the twentieth century. Moreover, Paul Klee's concept of painting discussed here shifts the performative aspect from the artist's activity to the elements of the image, interpreted from the point of view of their interactions.

The article examines the theoretical and pedagogical writings by Klee (both published during his lifetime and posthumously), considered as the basis for the interpretation of his paintings. The artist assumed that the pictorial elements are bound by the principle of motion – a line is a trace left by a moving point, while a plane is created by the movement of a line. Associated with this theory, defined as “performative geometry,” is the semantic interpretation. The whole concept leads to approaching a painting as a unique “performance” of pictorial elements.

The article also points to other contemporary interpretations of Klee's works, which examine the problems of performativity. On this basis, the author concludes that the source of the performative turn in the visual arts can be sought in the art of the 1920s and 1930s, as well as outside direct references to performance art.

Keywords: performative turn, Paul Klee, performative geometry, motion of the lines, performance art

In the opening of his *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Paul Klee wrote: "An active line on a walk, moving freely, without goal. A walk for a walk's sake. The mobility agent is a point, shifting its position forward."¹ Therefore, it is a point that moves in a drawing or an image, and its activity is transferred onto a line. Of

¹ P. Klee, *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, transl. S. Moholy-Nagy, Praeger Publishers, New York-Washington 1972, p. 16.

course, we know that it was a graphic artist or a painter that physically created the line, but his presence does not have to be clearly perceptible to the recipient, nor do we have to imagine him at work to capture the element of artistic activity. According to Klee, we have to focus on the performance of a line, not on the artist's hand touching the surface of paper or canvas with a pencil or a brush. It is the line that sets off for a walk, not the artist. That walk takes place due to the assumption that we do not look at a line as a holistically treated form occupying certain part of the plane, but we perceive it as a trace of a moving point. It is the point that is the "mobility agent," it is the point that works within the image, moving forward. Its path may pan out in different ways. It can cover the shortest distance from one place on the plane to another (straight line), it can swerve along the way to visit other places (broken line), or it can circulate freely, go backwards, and so on. Sometimes, the path is isolated (one line), but usually there are other lines accompanying it. Their route can be parallel or intersect one or more times with the direction of movement of the first point. In *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, Klee gives some examples of the course of a line. He presents even more, along with his comments, in his private notes published by Jürg Spiller.²

The artist then goes on to deliberate on figures. Broken straight lines can form the boundaries of a geometric shape (rectangle, triangle, or more complex forms). The dynamism of these shapes, says Klee, is determined by the energy of motion of the lines. When we look at the outline of a geometrical figure (drawn linearly), approaching it as a whole, we see forces operating within it and tensions running in different directions depending on the arrangement of the sides. They are related to tracking the direction of the target's movement. This effect disappears when the inside of the figure is filled uniformly with black or another color. Then the path of the moving point can no longer be traced. We are looking at a flat surface with a specific outline. Its edges are linear, but these lines do not act on their own. "We still see lines, but not linear acts,"³ Klee writes in his commentary. However, he points out the potential to activate planar forms. It boils down to considering them as "linear results of planar action."⁴ As a starting point, he chooses ideal figures – a square, an equilateral triangle and a circle. In their case, the linear internal movements are aligned and balanced. In the case of other shapes, we see the dominance of certain elements. For example, a rectangle can be stretched vertically and horizontally depending on the elongation of its respective sides. Klee marks

² Paul Klee: *The Thinking Eye*, ed. J. Spiller, transl. R. Manheim, George Wittenborn, New York, Lund Humphries, London 1961, p. 105-111.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 112.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

these deformations using the lines ending with arrows pointing in the direction of the moving forces. In the case of a circle, he considers the rotational movement and its possible irregularities leading to the distortion of the figure.

The next stage of this systematic reasoning concerns the situation where figures partly overlap. This problem is analyzed mainly taking into account the linear outlines of the shapes, which allows for the examination of what is happening inside the intersecting figures. Klee traces and comments on the mutual interpenetration and isolation of the common areas, the emergence of new forms, as well as the variety of organization of the developing disparities aiming to create a new unity. He uses the previously introduced analytical procedure of identifying the nature of the figure by means of straight lines running parallel to the longer side. Applying such schemes, he takes into account the situations in which the planar outlines intersect at different angles. Commenting on those cases, he invites us to "compare the action with the scene of action."⁵ The interlocking planes are not only "active" bodies, they also form the image of space. Moreover, Klee stresses that such an effect can be achieved not only through systems of lines, but also by changing the tones (values) suggestive of chiaroscuro. Concluding this part of his reflections, the artist writes that the effects thus achieved are "structures of similar or dissimilar forms, which stand close together, touch, interpenetrate or intermesh, while one absorbs of the other."⁶ The comment could also refer to a representational image, showing the dynamic relationships that occur in the outside world, or to a description of a theatre stage and the relationship between the actors performing thereon.

Klee's approach to visual issues both in his notes and in his *Pedagogical Sketchbook* brings to mind the famous Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*, and more specifically its first book.⁷ Although the artist makes no direct reference to this work in any of the texts mentioned above (nor, to my knowledge, in any other of his writings), the analogies are very clear. In both cases, the discussion begins with the point, moving on to the line, the plane, and figures (circles, triangles, rectangles). In Euclid's treatise, the system of definitions, postulates, and theorems is axiomatized. Theorems stem from axioms accepted as true in advance. In Klee's case, there is no axiomatization in the strict sense, but the artist clearly tends to suggest a relationship between the individual elements of his reasoning. He aims to show the relationship between the successively

⁵ Ibidem, p.119.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Cf. Euclid, Euclid's *Elements of Geometry*, the Greek text of J.L. Heiberg (1883–1885), edited and provided with a modern English translation by R. Fitzpatrick, 2008. <http://farside.ph.utexas.edu/Books/Euclid/Elements.pdf> [accessed 26 Aug. 2015].

considered elements. Like Euclid, Klee also has a tendency to illustrate his arguments with drawings. Discussing the principles of ancient geometry, Euclid illustrated his assertions with systems of lines, circles, and straight lines. In Klee's writings, the importance of drawings is even greater. They are not so much evidence as the main focus and the driving force of reasoning. This does not mean, however, that the artist is limited to exploring geometric elements, treating this as his only aim. On the contrary, in both texts discussed here, at one point he presents his "semantic explanation" (as he put it),⁸ pointing to the equivalents of his queries in the physical world and in the field of metaphysics. Thus, he attempts to describe specific problems using the "geometry" he created.

However, regarding the aforementioned analogies, there is a significant difference between the point of view adopted by Euclid and Klee's deliberations. The system presented by the ancient Greek author is static. It consists of a description of geometrical elements treated as fixed. He then adds theorems pertaining to them and evidence that involves the performance of some actions (for example, demonstrating that the sum of two sides of a triangle is greater than the third side etc.). Klee, on the other hand, presumes that the relationships between the individual elements are dynamic. The line is a trace of a moving point, the plane is the product of a moving line, etc. Thus, we can say that action is the essence of Klee's concept. This type of geometry can therefore be described as performative. Euclid created a system that was to be of use when carrying out specific practical tasks in construction, carpentry, land measurements, etc. In Klee's case, the geometrical explorations contained in his private notes and in his *Pedagogical Sketchbook* were meant to create a new basis for painterly practice. However, their educational nature should not be understood narrowly. This is not an equivalent of the medieval pattern book by Villard de Honnencourt. As regards their role, Klee's texts have more in common with Leonardo da Vinci's *Treatise on Painting*, where deliberations relating to resolving specific professional issues are combined with developing a general concept of this field of art. Klee focuses on the latter objective. Rather than attempting to teach students how to paint a picture, he aims to show such methods of understanding visual elements that have been hitherto overlooked. Generally speaking, the objective is to shift the focus of both the artist and the recipient from the final product to the process. It is not, however, the physical process of painting, but the process which occurs within the image. A line is not a fixed element, but is produced by a moving point – it is a representation of action. The shape of such line is irrelevant, as is its placement in relation to the other shapes that can be assessed as static or dynamic. Each line is a movement, a kind of "performance" of a point. This interest in the previously di

⁸ P. Klee, *Pedagogical ...*, op. cit., p. 21.

sregarded processuality could be linked to the avant-garde explorations carried out since the beginning of the twentieth century and described by the researchers studying the origins of performance art.⁹ One could also regard this as a component of the performative approach to art, which led up to performance art. Marvin Carlson writes: "What it had most in common with these and other experimental movements in both theatre and dance of the early twentieth century was an interest in developing the expressive qualities of the body, especially in opposition to logical and discursive thought and speech, and in seeking the celebration of form and process over content and product".¹⁰ Klee's experimental work is one of the components of this trend, but the artist is mainly interested in the mobile qualities of pictorial elements, not the human body. In addition, his respect for form and process does not eliminate content.

What are the consequences of the artist's processual approach? Referring to the structure of the human body, he accentuates its kinetic properties. Discussing the skeletal system (skeleton), instead of focusing on its proportions or mutual support of individual elements (as was the case with the painters and sculptors in ancient times), he concentrates on its movement. The bones provide the support, Klee writes, but the kinetics of the body is determined by the muscles. He also introduces the following categories of bodily organs: active, which issue commands (brain), medial (muscle), and passive (bones).¹¹ Another example he discusses is that of a water mill. Here, too, he points to the relationships between passivity and activity and different types of forces. He also tries to employ the processual approach in discussing the traditional artistic problems of spatial dimensions and balance. For him, stativity is dynamism in equilibrium.

The fourth part of the deliberations presented in *Pedagogical Sketchbook* feature metaphysical references to "performative geometry" outlined at the beginning. Klee uses the shape of a spiral as his model. "Motion here," he writes, "is no longer finite; and the question of direction regains new importance. This direction determines either a gradual liberation from the center through freer and freer motions, or an increasing dependence on an eventually destructive center."¹² Naturally, the interpretation depends on the assumed direction of movement of the point forming the spiral line. If we assume that the point moves from the center of the spiral in ever widening circles, this will be associated with increasing freedom, understood as independence from the

⁹ Cf. M. Kirby, *Futurist Performance. With manifestos and play scripts translated from the Italian by Victoria Nes Kirby*, E.P. Dutton & Co, New York 1971.

¹⁰ M. Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, Routledge, New York 2004, p. 110.

¹¹ P. Klee, *Pedagogical...*, p. 27-30.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 53.

center. If we assume that the line-forming point moves in the opposite direction, its dependence on the center increases. In his drawing, Klee marked both these directions with arrows, adding the following commentary: "This is the question of life and death; and the decision rests with the small arrow."¹³

Next, Klee examines the theme of the arrow. He presents its various elements, starting with a line, to which a blade and "feathers" are subsequently added. They give the drawn arrow a direction, important also from the point of view of its symbolic meaning. "The father of the arrow," Klee writes, "is the thought: how do I expand my reach? Over this river? This lake? That mountain? The contrast between man's ideological capacity to move at random through material and metaphysical spaces and his physical limitations is the origin of all human tragedy. It is a contrast between power and prostration that implies the duality of human existence. Half-winged, half-imprisoned, this is man! Thought is the mediary between earth and world. The broader the magnitude of his reach, the more painful man's tragic limitation."¹⁴

I have cited the entire passage because it is an excellent illustration of the transition from specific problems related to "performative geometry" by referring to the motion of objects in space, to the symbolic meanings relating to the human situation. Considering this issue, the artist takes into account the characteristics of geometric elements according to his own approach associated with movement as their origin. An aimlessly moving point can set lines indefinitely. In practice, however, a drawn line always has a beginning and an end. This situation becomes a starting point for Klee to form his next generalizing reflection: "Revelation: that nothing that has a start can have infinity." Next, he writes in the tone of a moralizing maxim: "Be winged arrows, aiming at fulfilment and goal, even though you will tire without having reached the mark."¹⁵

Another type of general references suggested in *Pedagogical Sketchbook* concerns not so much the situations and actions in human life, but rather the processes associated with the movements occurring in the physical world. Klee marks them with arrows or thicker lines. The gradual increasing or decreasing of the width of a line suggests movement, which the artist associates with the processes of ascending and descending, or moving towards infinity.

Klee's examination of composition-related issues – namely, the arrangement of the elements on the surface of a painting or drawing – is also approached from a performative perspective, as "movement organization." Usually, pictorial

¹³ Ibidem, p. 53.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 54. Regarding a winged man, it is worth noting that Klee made a drawing depicting a figure with a single wing, bearing the artist's own facial features.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 54.

composition is conceived as a static arrangement of a certain area on the canvas or paper. Since in “performative geometry” individual elements are analyzed as the outcome of movement, their arrangement also should take “mobile factors” into account. Composition, the artist writes, can be complete “if movement is met by counter-movement or if a solution of kinetic infinity has been found.”¹⁶ This problem affects the organization of both shapes and colours. When considering the organization of colours, Klee takes into account mainly their systemic relationships (for example as part of the colour wheel). This corresponds to the systemic approach employed in the reflections on shapes discussed above. Considering the relationships between basic colours (their mutual complementarity or contrast), and between basic colours and their derivatives, Klee translates them into mobile factors. Colours approach one another or move away, they are dependent or independent of one another. Added to them is grey – a non-colour, an element from outside of the chromatic system. This creates the perceptions of movement and counter-movement of colours. As regards the organization of colours, however, the fundamental problem is their harmonization. Klee views this issue as a transition from pathos (or tragedy) to ethos, “which encompasses energy and counter-energy within itself.”¹⁷

Critics and art historians tend to agree that the fundamental element of Klee’s oeuvre is the principle of abstraction. They assume that observing objects, Klee eliminated some of their characteristics he deemed irrelevant, aiming to reveal their essence. Such an approach was associated with the Aristotelian interpretation of the category of mimesis,¹⁸ which was considered a type of cognitive activity. Practicing art of this kind, the artist aimed to create a typical representation of an object, corresponding not to that specific, individual item, but to a more general notion, whose denotation is a class of objects. Klee’s works have been also interpreted in this way by Sybil Moholy-Nagy, author of the introduction to the English translation of *Pedagogical Sketchbook*. She writes: “Paul Klee replaced deduction by induction. Through observation of the smallest manifestation of form and interrelationship, he could conclude about the magnitude of natural order. Energy and substance, that which moves and that which is moved, were of equal importance as symbols of creation. He loved the natural event; therefore he knew its meaning in the universal scheme.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibidem, p. 59.

¹⁷ Ibidem, p. 60.

¹⁸ Cf. W. Tatarkiewicz, *Historia estetyki*, vol. I, Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2009, p. 167.

¹⁹ S. Moholy-Nagy, *Introduction* in: P. Klee, *Pedagogical ...*, op. cit. p. 5. By deduction in art, the author means the mindset used in the academic art since the Renaissance, which consisted in the fact that any representation of reality was derived from the general principles of absolute beauty and conventionally accepted canons of color (ibid., p. 5).

From the perspective of this interpretation, which refers to the artist's theoretical texts, one could also make a different observation. In his paintings, Klee did not interpret the surrounding reality. He constructed his paintings and drawings using the principles of his “performative geometry” and making a semantic interpretation of the resulting arrangements of shapes and colours. This is most likely what the artist meant when he wrote in his *Creative Confession* (1920): “Art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible.”²⁰

That statement could also apply to the performativity of painting. A painting is not a reproduction of movement observed in the surrounding world in the same sense a photograph is an attempt to register it. Movement in a painting derives from an understanding of the dynamic nature of its pictorial components. Such singular “performative geometry,” whose principles Klee had formulated in his theoretical texts, can make visible on the surface of a painting various phenomena of movement that the artist may include in his work. In his *Creative Credo*, Klee stressed that “the formal elements of graphic art are dot, line, plane, and space – the last three charged with energy of various kinds.”²¹ However, they are only a starting point. Artistic creativity takes place, as the artist put it, in “the land of deeper insight”.²² The dead center being the point, our first dynamic act will be the line. After a short time, we shall stop to catch our breath (the broken line, or the line articulated by several stops). I look back to see how far we have come (counter-movement). Ponder the distance thus far travelled (sheaf of lines). A river may obstruct our progress: we use a boat (wavy line). Further on there might be a bridge (series of curves). On the other bank we encounter someone who, like us, wishes to deepen his insight. At first we joyfully travel together (convergence), but gradually differences arise (two lines drawn independently of each other). Each party shows some excitement (expression, dynamism, emotional quality of the line).²³

This quote demonstrates what can be expressed with lines. Their dynamics makes it possible to show marching that runs continuously or intermittently, forwards or backwards (reverse movement) in one direction or in different directions. It may follow the path of a single figure or several different ones (multiple lines running independently), parallel or divergent, aimed at a specific target or going astray. At the same time, other lines may relate to the changes of mood of walking people (emotional quality of the line), as well as the characteristics of objects and people. Klee emphasizes that there should be

²⁰ P. Klee, *Creative Credo*, in: *Theories of Modern Art. A Source Book by Artists and Critics*, ed. by H.B. Chipp, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles and London 1996, p. 182.

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 183.

²² *Ibidem*, p. 183.

²³ *Ibidem*.

many “elements of linear expression,” they should generate infinite opportunities of “variation” and create “possibilities for expressing ideas,” i.e. express the course of thought, not spatial movement.²⁴ Such rich semantic capabilities do not originate from the mimetic representation of appearance taking into account the process of abstraction, but from action. Klee writes: “It may be true that ‘in the beginning there was the deed’, yet the idea comes first. Since infinity has no definite beginning, but like a circle may start anywhere, the idea may be regarded as primary. ‘In the beginning was the word’”²⁵ This statement is ambiguous. One interpretation is that a work of art does not begin with a view of reality that is to be presented, but with the artist’s action. Its outcome, as a result of appropriate semantic interpretation, will direct us toward a narrative about certain events and states of affairs, bringing forth an image of the world planned earlier by the artist.²⁶ Everything depends on the artist’s decision and the appropriate interpretation of the recipient.

Another way to understand Klee’s idea is to assume that activity is an inherent trait of the pictorial components. It is in them that the performative element is present at the beginning. Their purpose is not to tell a preplanned story, but the narrative is the consequence of their activity. This approach to the pictorial elements in Klee’s work corresponds to performance art rather than to the model of plot development in theatre. In theatre, the character on stage is subordinated to the story told in the play. Any action follows a specific script. Meanwhile, the performers, as has been repeatedly emphasized, often do not know what they are going to do when they are facing their audience. Their action develops in relation to perceived objects, sometimes in response to specific individuals spotted in the audience and their behaviour. In this sense, a performance is an experience, as defined by Carlson.²⁷

It is difficult to decide which of these interpretations is closer to Klee’s own views. In his texts, there are passages suggesting that both these positions are valid. The following excerpt seems to support the first one: “The Biblical story of the creation is an excellent parable of movement. The work of art, too, is above all a process of creation, it is never experienced as a mere product.”²⁸

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 184.

²⁵ Ibidem.

²⁶ With this interpretation, there is a convergence of artistic creativity with the performative function of language described by Austin. Performative utterances do not express knowledge about the state of things, but establish it (for example, taking marriage vows, or naming a ship). Cf. John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, eds. J.O. Urmson and M. Sbisí, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1962.

²⁷ Cf. M. Carlson, op. cit. 110.

²⁸ P. Klee, *Creative Credo*, op. cit. p. 185.

The reference to the Scripture suggests that there is an original, content-related, narrative authorial intention, which is implemented using the knowledge of different motor abilities of the pictorial elements that play only their assigned semantic roles. The second interpretation, on the other hand, seems to be dominating when the artist writes: “Only the dead point as such is timeless. In the universe, too, movement is the basic datum. (What causes movement? This is an idle question, rooted in error.) On this earth, repose is caused by an accidental obstruction in the movement of matter. It is an error to regard such a stoppage as primary.”²⁹ In this case, the course of movement is not predetermined. Important events involving pictorial elements that take place on canvas or paper are analogous to the situations occurring in life or in a performance. At the same time, the reference to movement in the universe in the above quote indicates that neither the original state of man nor the pictorial elements can be treated as motionless.

The fact that the artist approached the issue of motion in painting with full theoretical knowledge is evidenced by his reference to *Laocoon*, an essay by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Lessing’s work makes a distinction between spatial and temporal art, important for both the subsequent view of aesthetics as science, and artistic activity. The German author associates temporal arts with movement. As for spatial arts, they were not only deprived of movement, but also should not attempt to represent it.³⁰ Disagreeing with Lessing, Klee writes: “For space, too, is a temporal concept. When a dot begins to move and becomes a line, this requires time. Likewise, when a moving line produces a plane, and when moving planes produce spaces.”³¹ Therefore, he cites the principles of his “performative geometry” as arguments in the dispute, indicating that painting is an art which takes into account not only space, but time as well.

One might consider, however, that the views voiced by Klee represent his personal artistic ideology, which helps him in his work as an artist, but has little significance for the recipient of art. The artist anticipates this allegation. He invokes Feuerbach’s words that to understand a painting one needs a chair, the rationale for its role in aesthetic reception being that otherwise the recipient’s legs will get tired quickly and s/he will only cast a quick glance at the painting. Klee, on the other hand, believed that works of art should be received

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ Lessing wrote: “But, if painting, owing to its signs, or means of imitation, which it can combine in space only, is compelled entirely to renounce time, progressive actions, as such, cannot be classed among its subjects” (G.E. Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay on the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, transl. E.C. Beasley, Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, London 1853, p. 99-100).

³¹ P. Klee, *Creative Credo...*, p. 184.

by following the shapes with one's eyes, as only then would one be able to fully appreciate and feel the movement contained within them. "The beholder's eye, which moves about like an animal grazing - follows the paths prepared for it in the picture (in music, as everyone knows, there are conduits leading to the ear; the drama has both visual and auditive trails). The pictorial work was born of movement, is itself recorded movement, and is assimilated through movement (eye muscles)."³² This quotation introduces the problem of the bodily nature of artistic reception and the question of the role of empathy.

According to Klee, the performative character of a drawing or painting does not consist in the fact that the process of the artist's work can be seen as a type of performance art. Klee is not interested in the fact that the energy increases when the painter works more vigorously, and decreases when he works intently, carefully arranging lines and spots of colour. Also, in his opinion performativity is not dependent on the nature of the represented object. The starting point of Klee's concept are pictorial elements, which are entitled to a certain performative quality. Their use and the establishment of the types of movement involved shapes the significance of the work. Its semantic value does not come from representing a particular theme; it has its source in the selection of the components of the painting and its composition. Therefore, Klee stresses, "Art is simile of the Creation. Each work of art is an example, just as the terrestrial is an example of the cosmic."³³ It does not reproduce its fragments, but consists in shaping them parallel to the processes taking place within it. It uses the mobile capabilities of the pictorial elements, arranging them in complete sets, analogous to the changes taking place in the world. Such creat esis, rather than the image of nature, the finished product."³⁴

The above claim can be given a metaphysical sense. In such a case, the word "Genesis" is associated with the biblical Book of Genesis and understood as a reference to the creation of the world treated as a continuous process. This interpretation is most commonly accepted by the scholars studying Klee's oeuvre. However, one can also consider it in the context of performativity, assuming that it concerns the formation of meaning in the painting. That meaning is not fixed nor given in advance. "The image of nature" gradually emerges from the previously described activity of pictorial elements. A similar process takes place in performance art. Confronting performance with theatricality,

³² Ibidem, p. 185.

³³ Ibidem, p. 186.

³⁴ P. Klee, "On Modern Art", [in:] *Art in Theory 1900-1990 An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, ed. by Ch. Harrison and P. Wood, Blackwell Publishers, Oxford & Cambridge 1999, p. 348.

³⁵ J. Féral, *Performance and Theatricality: The Subject Demystified*, transl. T. Lyons, "Modern Drama" 1982, nr 1, p. 173.

Josette Féral stated resolutely: “Performance is the absence of meaning.”³⁵ The author is not referring to asematicity, but to the special way of shaping meaning. Next, she writes that “if any experience is meaningful, without a doubt it is that of performance. Performance does not aim at a meaning, but rather makes meaning.”³⁶ A similar situation occurs in the case of Klee’s paintings and drawings. From the actions of the pictorial elements emerges the image of the world, as well as further meanings of general, conceptual character.

Based on the performativity of pictorial elements, attempts have been made to interpret both the general creative attitude of the artist, and his individual works. The changes of the former have been analyzed by such scholars as Nedaa Elias, who stated that Klee “placed more emphasis on the formative powers than on the finished forms.”³⁷ This position seems to me to be too radical because it suggests that the resulting visual effect is of secondary importance. Moreover, the painter showed great concern for the ultimate visual effect of his paintings. They were not sketches. This is evident when we compare his sketches published in the book *The Thinking Eye* with the reproductions of his drawings or paintings. The drawing *Difficult Journey Through O.* (1927)³⁸ features many lines, running together and individually, but supplemented with various descriptive elements, evocative of houses, sun (or full moon) in the sky, and so on. The whole arrangement forms a tale of a journey. The “formative power” of pictorial elements plays a prominent role, but the work is not limited to the representation of formativity. The painting also includes a narrative, which is its essential component. This aspect of Klee’s work is expressed in the titles, which were considered to be of great importance by the artist.

Another example would be the watercolor *Dancing From Fright* (1938).³⁹ Referring to the artist’s writings, the editor of Klee’s notes, Jürg Spiller, says that there are two balanced types of energy in the painting: “linear-active” and “planar-active (linear-passive).” Given their “formative power,” he writes that “the lines dynamize the accented motion of the planes (dynamic accentuation by rotation).”⁴⁰ But one cannot ignore the fact that for many recipients the planar elements (triangles and rectangles), as well as the lines that are the extensions of their sides, resemble schematic images of human figures. Klee amplifies this effect by adding small circles suggesting the shape of their heads. The result is a painting depicting people who make various dance-like gestures out of fear. Noting this representational effect provides a basis for an empathetic

³⁶ Ibidem, p. 173.

³⁷ N. Elias, *Paul Klee - Making Visible. Art does not reproduce the visible; rather it makes visible.* www.nidaelias.com (January 22, 2014) [accessed 21 July 2015].

³⁸ Reproduced in: *Paul Klee: The Thinking ...*, op. cit., p. 106.

³⁹ Reproduced in: ibidem, p. 114.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 114.

development of emotions based on one's identification with the dynamic figures of human feelings in a state of terror. Klee's concept of "performative geometry," therefore, does not eliminate the problems of empathy, but only leads to the assignment of considerable importance to the dynamic origin of the observed shapes. This question can be linked with "modernist synthetic practice," described by Ivana Wingham. The author emphasizes that Klee's work takes into account "an oppositional, dialectical mode of looking and thinking that is both synthetic and analytic," and is based on "an interplay of movements in the universe."⁴¹ As part of this dialectic, however, Wingham focuses mainly on another aspect of Klee's concept.

She is not so much interested in the possibilities of the movement of a line, but in the role of the artist's self. As her starting point, she uses Klee's phrase from his notebooks, where he refers to "taking the line for a walk." Undertaking the task of interpreting the meaning of this metaphor, she focuses on exceeding the limits of visibility. Citing the views of Jacques Lacan, she points out that, in contrast to the phenomenology of perception of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Lacan emphasized the movements of the viewer, his "grip," his muscle and visceral emotions, primarily in relation to the role of the eye. Thus, he stressed "his total intentionality."⁴²

Wingham's other point of reference, although included for a similar purpose, are the views of Rosalind E. Krauss from the book *The Optical Unconscious*, where she writes about the "tactility of vision" and "the space of pointing." Krauss says that a subject somehow reaches for the observed, grabbing it, touching, moving his fingers on the front and the sides, and manipulating it. In this way, the viewer enters the painting by way of a projection. The author of the article believes that Klee entered his paintings, as the actions he described – the movements of a point, lines and planes, have such tactile character.

I have cited Wingham's article because it demonstrates a different approach to the performative aspect in the visual arts. In this case, performance does take the artist into account, although not because of his physical effort related to the act of painting, understood as putting portions of pigment on the canvas. The physicality and tactility are dialectically linked to the process of looking, they are a "tactile way of looking," bringing us closer to achieving "pure mobility." From this point of view, Klee's painting may be considered as a "figuration of movement."⁴³ The author cites the views of Robert Kudeilko, who pointed out

⁴¹ I. Wingham, „Taking the line for a walk” - within Paul Klee modernist practice, LIMITS: 21st Annual Conference of the Society of Architectural Historians, Australia & New Zealand, Melbourne, Australia, 26–29 September 2004, <http://eprints.brighton.ac.uk/5647/> [accessed on August 26, 2015].

⁴² Cited after: I. Wingham, „Taking the line for a walk”..., op. cit.

⁴³ I. Wingham, „Taking the line for a walk”..., op. cit.

that in his notebooks Klee did not refer to purely visual factors, but to such indicators as gravity, movement, etc. In particular, he considered the issue of movement to be especially complex. The artist wrote that when a modern man is walking on a ship deck, he must realize his own movement, the movement of the ship, which can run in the opposite direction, the direction and the speed of the water current, the rotation of the earth, its orbits, as well as the orbits of all moons and planets around it.⁴⁴ Therefore, he must take into account the entire complex interplay of movements in the universe and himself on the ship as the center. I believe that this can be seen as the concept of a total performance. Klee's paintings by Klee were supposed to be visual counterparts of such sensations, utilizing various dynamic opportunities of pictorial elements.

Thus, what makes it difficult for us to join such an interplay of movements is our concentration on the shell of our body, and the division into the space inside and outside it. What Klee suggests is to indicate the points of exchange. Citing Elizabeth Grosz's idea of "volatile bodies," which entails an exchange of the external and the internal ("inside out," "outside in"), Wingham writes that according to Klee, the body is a threshold concept, due to which one thinks not only in terms of oppositions, but also in terms of optical vs non-optical. That which belongs to the sphere of seeing intermingles with what goes beyond it.⁴⁵ Developing this idea further, one may say that such an approach indicates the way of transgressing the division into the spatial and the temporal, as well as the static and the dynamic. Thus, the category of performativity enters the field of fine arts.

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⁴⁴ Paul Klee: *The Thinking ...*, op. cit. , p. 79.

⁴⁵ I. Wingham, „*Taking the line for a walk*” ..., op. cit.

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ZWROT PERFORMATYWNY W SZTUKACH PLASTYCZNYCH. KONCEPCJA SZTUKI PAULA KLEE (streszczenie)

Zwrot performatywny w wielu dziedzinach nauk humanistycznych zaznaczył się w latach siedemdziesiątych XX wieku. Wprawdzie najważniejsi jego reprezentanci podkreślali, że obejmuje on także sztuki plastyczne, jednak konkretne przykłady ograniczane były zwykle do akcjonistycznych zjawisk artystycznych z pogranicza sztuki performance i malarstwa lub rzeźby. Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę wskazania, że tendencja do performatywnego ujmowania sztuki występowała już w ramach działań awangardowych pierwszej połowy XX wieku. Ponadto omawiany

w nim przykład koncepcji malarskiej Paula Klee przenosi obszar performatywności z aktywności artysty na elementy plastyczne interpretowane z punktu widzenia zachodzących między nimi działań.

Przedmiotem analiz prowadzonych w artykule są pisma teoretyczne i pedagogiczne Klee (zarówno opublikowane za jego życia, jak pośmiertnie) rozważane jako podstawa interpretacji jego obrazów. Artysta zakładał, że elementy plastyczne wiąże zasada ruchu - linia to ślad przesuwania się punktu, płaszczyzna to ślad ruchu linii. Z tą teorią, która zostaje określona jako „geometria performatywna”, związana jest interpretacja semantyczna. Całość koncepcji prowadzi do ujęcia obrazu jako swoistego „performansu” elementów plastycznych.

W artykule wskazane są również inne współczesne interpretacje twórczości Klee, w których rozważane są problemy performatyki. Na tej podstawie autorka wnioskuje, że źródła zwrotu performatywnego w sztukach plastycznych można poszukiwać w twórczości lat 20. i 30. ubiegłego stulecia, a ponadto że znajdują się one także poza obszarem bezpośrednich odniesień do performance art.

Słowa kluczowe: zwrot performatywny, Paul Klee, geometria performatywna, ruch linii, sztuka performance