



GUSTAV KLIMT

Klimt's Landscapes and the Telescope

Anselm Wagner

In the concluding chapter of the picture story *Plisch und Plum* (Ker and Plunk) by Wilhelm Busch (1832–1908), published in 1882, an eccentric guest appears. Clad in fine tweed and wearing a pith helmet he strides through the German heath with his telescope poised:

Traveling in this neighborhood,
A chap whose wealth is more than good,
In his hand, a telescope,
Comes this Mister, known as "Hope."
"Why not," — and here it's Hope who's talking—
"Watch distant things, the while I'm walking?
It's lovely *there*, as like as not,
And I am *here*, no matter what!"¹

Of course exploring nature in this way cannot be without mishap for long. Mr. Hope tumbles into a pond, the dogs Ker and Plunk retrieve his pith helmet and telescope, and this makes such an impression on the wealthy Englishman that he immediately buys both animals from their owner for a vast sum—thus sealing the social advancement of the two pooches and leading to the story's happy ending.

If we take Mr. Hope to mean more than his function in Busch's story then he is an apt symbol of an aesthetic concept characterizing the early modernists from the nineteenth through the early twentieth century. In the character of Mr. Hope, Busch goes far beyond the cliché of the rich Englishman who is both distinguished and eccentric.² Mr. Hope is the colonial and Victorian variation of *homo aestheticus*. He prefers the technically produced view into the distance to the walker's immediate experience of nature. His gaze into the distance arises not from the drive of a scientist or huntsman but the need for aesthetic enjoyment, for beauty: "It's lovely *there*, as like as not,/ And I am *here*, no matter what!" "Here" may also be lovely



Wilhelm Busch, *Mr. Hope*, illustration
in *Ker and Plunk* (Heidelberg, 1882)

but the lack of distance to "here" makes purely aesthetic viewing impossible. "Here" is space but it is not a picture. Becoming a picture presupposes distance. Now "there" or "elsewhere," the distance on the edge of the horizon, can also be seen with the naked eye. Essentially, this was the concept behind all European landscape painting from the Renaissance: creating from a distance a panorama of a wide, traversable landscape, ranging from the tree at the edge of the path to the faraway horizon and stratified into fore-, middle, and background. Mr. Hope is more radical in this respect. He fades out the fore- and middle ground and concentrates only on the background, which becomes for him his sole focus. "Elsewhere" only becomes truly beautiful when one surrenders totally to distance, draws it up close, and utterly immerses oneself in it—even at the cost of becoming calamitously blind to all that is close at hand as a result of this tunnel vision. This surrendering, however, is purely optical, and any form of tactile or whole body experience is excluded (indeed, as the fall into the pond reveals, this only hampers optical perception). In this respect, Mr. Hope is a brilliant caricature of the

modernist idea of the art viewer *avant la lettre* as envisaged by Clement Greenberg: a pure, bodiless eye and a monocular one at that. "Where the Old Masters created an illusion of space into which one could imagine oneself walking, the illusion created by a modernist is one into which one can only look, can travel through only with the eye."³ The image that Mr. Hope sees through his telescope in fact has an essential characteristic of modern painting (according to Greenberg, the quintessential characteristic):⁴ it is flat, at least considerably flatter than an open landscape seen through the naked eye. The magnifying lens condenses tiers of space, optically compressing objects into a single, shallow layer that in reality are far apart, and making objects appear diminished in volume. Busch already exposes this abstract "traveling eye" of the Greenberg mold as that which postmodern, feminist, and post-colonialist critique later discovered it to be: in truth it is white, Western, male, and middle-class.

Now the Busch-Greenberg connection may, on account of the great distance in period and subject-matter between the two, appear all too associative, and admittedly Greenberg makes no mention of a distant image. This term, however, plays a central role in the art theory of the German sculptor Adolf von Hildebrand (1847–1921), whose rigorous observation of art as a purely optical and formal phenomenon ultimately reached Greenberg by way of the Viennese art historian Alois Riegel (1858–1905).⁵ Astonishingly for a sculptor, Hildebrand demanded in his *Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst* (The Problem of Form in Fine Art), composed between 1888 and 1893,⁶ that painters and sculptors translate their impression of nature into pure planar images. This literally pictorial planar image he terms a "distant image," because from close up nature is experienced in a less optical and more haptic way and cannot be grasped at one glance, whereas in the distance it flattens out to a purely optical and thus pictorial phenomenon.⁷ In order to attain this purely planar distant image, Hildebrand even advised closing one eye because there are always elements of the near view in stereoscopic vision.⁸ The task of every artist was therefore "to remove what is tormenting from the cubic form,"⁹ which means transforming it into a flat distant image. Mr. Hope would be in agreement with Hildebrand to the extent that he

gazes into the distance with one eye to procure the pleasure of untormented beauty.

Riegl not only adopted from Hildebrand the contrasting couplet of the haptic near view and optical distant view but also the aesthetic preference for the latter. For him the distant view was a prerequisite for atmosphere, the central content of modern art: "This notion of law and order over chaos, harmony over dissonance, tranquility over movement we call atmosphere. Its elements are tranquility and the distant view."¹⁰ This atmosphere that is conveyed purely optically can, however, be destroyed by vital impulses at close quarters that appeal to the sense of touch: "Movement and the near view have hurled me back into the battle for existence."¹¹ In the case of Mr. Hope this meant: tumbling into the pond, the brief loss of the distant view, telescope, and pith helmet, and a soaking wet tweed suit. Of course both Hildebrand and Riegl regarded the distant view as a wide panorama and not a minute detail of the distance gained from peering through a telescope. Mr. Hope is in this respect more modern, and with his gaze, which is detached from his walking body by an optical instrument, he is closer to Greenberg's

abstract eye than to Hildebrand's and Riegl's distant image.

The separation of body and gaze by means of a telescope has the advantage for the viewer that he remains invisible to what he sees. Whether hunter, military scout, or voyeur, the observer has the privilege of invading something hidden, something that is not aware of this penetration and lingers in the naïveté of seclusion. This voyeuristic concept also has a long tradition in aesthetic discourse. As Michael Fried demonstrated, Denis Diderot (1713–84), the French philosopher and art critic, had already demanded that painters render their figures as if they were oblivious of being observed by the beholder of the picture.¹² Fried conveyed in this way, as Helmut Draxler established, "the original scene of the phantasm of 'pure vision,'" which plays a central role in Fried's modernism that rejects all theatricality.¹³ However, in this mode of "seeing in order not to be seen," Draxler identifies "the epitome of middle-class imagination."¹⁴

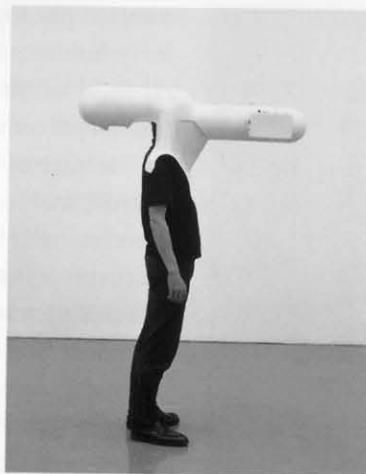
Seeing into the distance without being seen is one of the essential traits of television. At Mr. Hope's time this was still a vision of the future, although it already existed in



Telephonoscope, illustration in
Albert Robida's novel
The Twentieth Century (Paris 1883)

the minds of researchers and inventors and had been discussed both at a popular and literary level since the 1880s. A year after *Ker and Plunk*, Albert Robida's science fiction novel *The Twentieth Century* was published.¹⁵ The novel describes "telephonoscopes" (*opposite*), which project the erotic and exotic from far-off countries live into the middle-class living room and are a staggeringly exact prediction of the television society. In this way, a lady enjoys the opera from her bed or a bachelor relishes the charms of scantily clad dancers. The picture telephone was based on the idea of interconnection and in the visions of Robida and, later, Jules Verne this would especially be a way for separated lovers

to communicate with each other, not only acoustically but also optically. It is interesting that in most of these utopias and utopian caricatures the distant image holds an erotic fascination, the longing of the (usually male) subject for something distant that always turns out to be a yearning for the far-off female object, which appears to him as a live image.¹⁶ The faraway lady of courtly love now becomes graspably close without forfeiting the allure of distance. Our Mr. Hope, however, is a far cry away from this—he has completely sublimated his sexuality with his (phallic) telescope, which he uses to satisfy his craving: the craving for "elsewhere" and for beauty. This behavior has obvious imperialist connotations. The colonialization of large parts of the world from the mid-nineteenth century onward was driven ahead by researchers, explorers, and capitalists whose characteristics are united in the topee-clad Mr. Hope as the representative of the preeminent colonial power. His desire for the distant view corresponds with the need arising from the increasing globalization of economies and politics to combat distances with new technologies like the telegraph¹⁷ or telephone.¹⁸ The technical attempts to follow these with tele-images in the same way date back to 1843.¹⁹ The talk was of "electrical telescopy" and as early as 1884 an "electrical telescope" was patented in Berlin. The German term for television, *Fernsehen*, emerged for the first time in 1891. It was to be another thirty-five years until the BBC's first experimental television broadcasts, but the feverish efforts of researchers and the accompanying discussions in literature and printed media meant that from the 1880s onward, television was an important technical hope for the future. Of course the



Walter Pichler, *TV-Helmet (Portable Living Room)*, 1967, object made of polyester with a TV set, painted, Generali Foundation, Vienna

television picture differs from the telescope image because there are no optical changes in the former. The shortening of distance is not visible in the television picture so that the fading out of the immediate vicinity—and thus the loss of reality—is more complete.

A combination of telescope and television was constructed by the Austrian artist Walter Pichler (*left*). A television screen was mounted at the end of a tube which, when placed over the head, guaranteed tunnel vision with no distractions. This portable construction also allowed the wearer to watch television while walking around, presumably with consequences that would be just as calamitous as those experienced by

Mr. Hope. In fact the excursions into cyberspace that we embark on today by donning the "data pith helmet" are the perfect solution to Mr. Hope's longing for a virtual "elsewhere" that can be entered only optically.

The topicality of the aesthetic attitude personified by Mr. Hope is therefore unbroken. If it is correct that this is a symptomatic value for the early modernists, this must be reflected in the art of that time. Standing for many indirect references are the cited theory and sculptures by Hildebrand. A direct realization of Hope's "telescope aesthetics" seems conversely to have occurred only once.

In the summer of 1915, Gustav Klimt sent a postcard to his sister Hermine in Vienna from his holiday abode on the Attersee in the Upper Austrian Salzkammergut: "Arrived safe and well. Forgot opera glasses—need urgently. Helene will bring them with her. Regards Gustav."²⁰ The photo shows Villa Paulick in Seewalchen on the Attersee which Klimt often frequented²¹—not a glimmer of an opera or theater anywhere. Why then did the painter need this educational bourgeois gadget so "urgently" in the country? His niece Helene Donner was quoted in 1969 by Christian Nebehay as having said that Klimt used opera glasses when he was painting his Attersee landscapes.²² Strangely enough, Nebehay did not analyze this reference further. When Johannes Dobai studied Klimt's landscapes nine years later he tried to explain the specific aesthetics of the painting *Orchard with Roses* (plate 43)—albeit in a more metaphorical form: "Just as a fragment of nature that we have selected ourselves with a telescope appears to be a compact whole, this painting seems to convey a fragment of the universe with a harmony akin to music. It is

more than a coincidence that Klimt appears to have painted some of his landscapes with a telescope or used a viewing frame." The "viewing frame" (see p. 40), a small square frame made of card or ivory, was used by Klimt on his expeditions to seek out landscape motifs, like many *plein-air* painters of his day.²³ In the cited monograph on Klimt's landscape paintings published in 1978 and 1981, Dobai places the telescope on a par with the viewing frame and reduces it to its function of presenting a detail as a totality. He mentions the main function of the telescope—making distant objects appear close and concentrating them optically into one plane—only briefly in the catalogue raisonné of 1967.²⁴ Yet this is a phenomenon that strikes the viewer of Klimt's landscapes immediately and is mentioned by all commentators: their pronounced planarity. Fritz Novotny refers to the "large forms, flat as a stage set, having only the effect of silhouettes,"²⁵ of "par-

we used photographs taken with a focal length of thirty to forty millimeters, which roughly corresponds to the natural field of vision and a focal length of 250 millimeters (telelens) to simulate the "opera glasses effect."

The slice of landscape chosen for *Church at Unterach on the Attersee*, without sky or wide panorama as is almost always the case with Klimt, suggests that the painter/viewer was relatively close to the buildings. In 1968 Nebehay sought out this spot in a boat, supposedly fifty meters away from the bank, and took a photograph of it that he reproduced in his documentation next to Klimt's painting. At a glance it can be seen that it is impossible for Klimt to have painted his picture from this vantage point. The church steeple rises into the sky, so the chosen position was much too low. We doubled the distance until the steeple was backed completely by the range of hills (*below left*). However, from here also the viewpoint seems too low: the houses in front



Unterach am Attersee, photograph (standard lens), from a distance of 100 m, 1988



Unterach am Attersee, photograph (standard lens), from a distance of 300 m, 1988



Unterach am Attersee, photograph (telephoto lens), from a distance of 300 m, 1988

allel tiers like theater scenery";²⁶ Nebehay notes the "flat houses placed in rows as if chopped from a child's cut-out sheet."²⁷ Of course planarity is a feature of almost all (landscape) painting around 1900, and nobody would ever maintain that this was all the result of using telescopes and opera glasses. The assertion that Klimt indeed used opera glasses can only be proven if he painted something that would have been invisible to the naked eye.

While preparing for the exhibition *Inselräume: Teschner, Klimt und Flöge am Attersee* in 1988 at the Villa Paulick in Seewalchen, Alfred Weidinger and I put this to the test.²⁸ We selected the painting *Church at Unterach on the Attersee* of 1916 (plate 53) because the architecture and vegetation in this motif have hardly changed since Klimt's day. To verify this

almost totally conceal the church walls, and the meadow on the left in the background of Klimt's painting can hardly be seen. In addition, the cubic effect of the building and the diagonal vanishing lines contradict the strict orthogonal structure in Klimt's painting. From this position he would not only have had to stylize the architecture and landscape but also redesign and supplement it to result in this arrangement. The photograph in the center shows the same view from the same direction, but this time from a distance of about three hundred meters. The overlappings now correspond more with the painting, the roof ridge of the inn and the eaves of the church roof now follow one line, and the overall image has become much flatter due to the increased distance. How-

ever, the field of vision has expanded to such an extent that smaller details like the landing stage, precisely rendered in the painting, can no longer be detected with the naked eye. At this point, according to the hypothesis, Klimt would have had to reach for his opera glasses. We simulated this with a telephotograph from the same position (*opposite page, far right*). Here the section of the scene has again been compared with the painting, and the details are now clearly distinguishable. Above all, the three spatial zones of water, village, and hill have been compressed into a flat layer.

We could well have contented ourselves with this result. On closer analysis, however, we discovered several details that could not really be explained. The row of trees on the top left of the painting is concealed by the roof of the inn in the telephotograph. Similarly, the roof that protrudes between the inn and the church is not as high as in Klimt's landscape. Is it really conceivable that the artist, who here, as in other works, was meticulously faithful to the motif, conjured up additions to the scene or changes that would have entered his field of vision from further away? In addition, it seemed highly dubious that Klimt really painted from a boat, something which Marie-José Liechtenstein and later Nebehay and Dobai had assumed.²⁹ His more than one-square-meter canvas would have reacted like a small sail to every gust of wind, not to mention the constant rocking and motion of the waves. As Klimt almost never did preliminary drawings and studies for his landscapes but started painting directly onto the canvas in situ, he would have been exposed to such disturbances. It is hard to believe that he tolerated this, bearing in mind his notorious sensitivity and the total peace and quiet which he needed to paint.³⁰ As we found out in our experiment, it is virtually impossible to use opera glasses in a rocking boat. If we assume that Klimt used an optical instrument then it was from steady ground. The only possible location for this is from the opposite bank near Weissenbach, a distance of over two kilometers. With the naked eye the houses at Unterach have shrunk to tiny dots, which would render even the best opera glasses useless in providing the necessary enlargement. Klimt would have needed to ask for a telescope of the same caliber as Mr. Hope's from Vienna, of which there had hitherto been no mention in the sources.

Fortunately, Alfred Weidinger then made an important discovery. During his investigations at Villa Paulick he stumbled upon a photograph of 1904 showing Klimt on the villa's landing stage with a telescope and tripod in front of him (*above*). The wooden stand was even found in

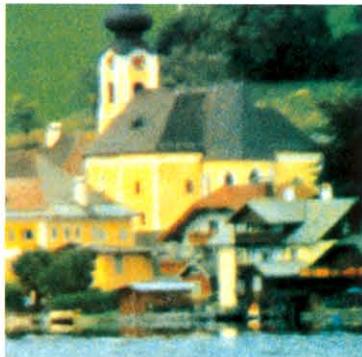


Gustav Klimt with a telescope on the landing stage at Villa Paulick in Seewalchen, 1904

the villa's attic, and we exhibited it in the aforementioned exhibition of 1988. From the photograph, Weidinger roughly identified Klimt's telescope, and with a similar model of 1905 with tenfold magnification he managed to find the spot where Klimt probably painted *Church at Unterach on the Attersee*. The picture illustrated on page 166 shows a photograph taken through this telescope that was set up on the lake's bank one kilometer south of Weissenbach and directed along exactly the same line toward Unterach as the previous positions of our boat. Now, the trees on the left, thicker in Klimt's day but in exactly the same position, emerge at the same height as the church steeple. The section of roof overlapped by the inn and church has a height which corresponds with the painting.

This proof that Klimt had painted the *Church at Unterach on the Attersee* from the opposite bank using a telescope³¹ encouraged us at that time to hypothesize that the other three views of Unterach had been created in the same way (plates 51, 52, 58). Greater changes to architecture and trees meant that it was more difficult to find evidence for these paintings, but the planar, stacked *Houses at Unterach on the Attersee* (plate 52) betray the same telescope optics as the buildings of the *Church at Unterach on the Attersee*. For Klimt, this method was by far the most practical because in the summers of 1915 and 1916 he lived in the forester's house in Weissenbach³² and worked daily on a number of paintings for a few hours at a time.³³ Long boat rides are hardly suitable for the rapid change in location that this would have

entailed. Later, Weidinger proved that a telescope was used also for earlier paintings: for *Schloss Kammer on the Attersee I* (1908, plate 33) and *Schloss Kammer on the Attersee II* (1909, plate 34) as well as for the two paintings from Lake Garda of 1913, *Church in Cassone* (plate 44) and *Malcesine on Lake Garda* (plate 46). All of these are buildings by a lake that were painted from the opposite bank.³⁴ Particularly impressive is the comparison of *Schloss Kammer on the Attersee I* with the actual motif: "Gustav Klimt certainly painted this picture from the sun deck of the boathouse at the Villa Oleander. It was only possible from this vantage point to find the pictorial motifs in this constellation. Klimt looks over the broad expanse of Attersee to Schloss Kammer.... The facade ... is reflected in the smooth surface of the lake's water. The same applies to the striking steeple of Seewalchen church. Nobody seems to have an inkling that



Unterach am Attersee,
photograph taken
through a telescope from
the opposite bank, 1988

between the mansion and the church there is an expanse of lake measuring eight hundred meters Klimt shortens the distance between mansion and church to a minimum."³⁵ As Verena Lobisser demonstrated in a photograph taken using a telephoto lens in August 2001 (right), the chosen prospect from the boathouse is slightly too low. Lobisser therefore presumes that Klimt painted the landscape from a window on the first floor. It can be assumed that all of the artist's Schloss Kammer depictions were translated onto canvas with the help of a telescope.³⁶ This also applies to *The Litzlbergkeller on the Attersee* of 1915/16 (plate 50). Previously, Weidinger and I had presumed that it was the sole Attersee landscape painted from an angle that could have been achieved only in a boat, and that in this instance Klimt used postcards and photographs.³⁷ But here also Lobisser managed to find the right spot on the opposite bank.

At this point the question springs to mind of whether Klimt could have simulated the telescope effect with his

own photographs taken with a telelens. Klimt was an enthusiastic amateur photographer,³⁸ and in his early period around 1890 he frequently painted from photographs; later on there are isolated incidences of this.³⁹ The painting *Forest Slope in Unterach on the Attersee* (plate 58) presents an especially plausible example because the artist, contrary to his usual practice, included the near bank and thus compressed a space of about three kilometers into a single pictorial plane, which is barely possible even with a telescope. Klimt would have had telelenses of adequate quality at his disposal, and to a certain extent Vienna even led the way in their technical development. The first modern telelens was constructed as early as 1890 by Adolph Steinheil and in 1892 was presented in the Viennese journal *Photographische Korrespondenz*.⁴⁰ After patents were registered in England and Germany, Karl Fritsch manufactured a telelens in his optical workshops in Vienna in 1892 with a visual angle of seven to ten degrees, providing fourfold magnification. In 1895 the Carl Zeiss Works produced a lens that already had a focal length of 152 millimeters. In 1912 a product of the C.P. Goerz company even managed to attain a focal length of 400 millimeters so that in a photograph of a church clock, four kilometers away, the minute hand could still be identified. R. Demachy linked telelenses to painting for the first time in 1898. He compiled a substantial report about its use in photographic art in which he referred to the "totally new representation of the background perspective," which "even excited the attention of painters."⁴¹ In 1905 the telelens was even termed the "objectif d'artiste."⁴²

True, until then no telephotographs had emerged that could be traced to Klimt, so much remains speculative. Conversely it is also conceivable that after seeing telephotographs by professional photographers, Klimt became



Schloss Kammer on the Attersee, photograph taken using a telephoto lens from the opposite bank, 2001

aware of the potential offered by optical instruments to shorten distances and flatten images. He would then have simulated the effects of the telelens with his opera glasses or telescope. Of the photographers with whom Klimt was evidently in contact, Heinrich Kühn (1866–1944) deserves a special mention. With Hans Watzek and Hugo Henneberg, Kühn belonged to the photographer trio that was the driving force behind the Vienna Camera Club. In 1902 this club exhibited in the Vienna Secession,⁴³ of which Klimt was the first president, and their photographs were even published in *Ver Sacrum*, the Secession's official journal. Klimt was briefly on the editorial team and regularly delivered illustrations for *Ver Sacrum*.⁴⁴ In addition, Klimt portrayed Henneberg's wife Marie in 1901–02.⁴⁵ Kühn probably already used telelenses at the beginning of the century, and this can be seen to greatest effect in a series dated about 1915, which shows hikers viewed from a steep top angle and projected onto a single plane by the zoom effect (right). The typical views in alpine photography of mountain panorama and sky have here been deliberately faded out.

Although it may now seem clear that Klimt used optical instruments, there is still uncertainty about the artist's motives. If we adopt the most obvious assumption—that he wanted to create a planar image—then there is still the aforementioned objection that thousands of early and classic modernist artists painted landscapes with some degree of planarity without reaching for technical aids like opera glasses, telescopes, or telelenses. The two-dimensional effect was evoked by artistic means alone, such as the planar application of paint, emphasizing the intrinsic value of color, and not using central perspective, to cite a few examples. Why then did Klimt put himself through the laborious procedure of looking with one eye through a telescope countless times to translate, stroke by stroke, this distant image onto the canvas?

In the search for comparable examples that come close to Klimt's intentions one meets with difficulties. Apart from a few exceptions, landscape painting around 1900 followed the well-established, century-long concept of the widest possible panorama—in other words, creating atmosphere through a distant view as described by Riegl. This concept was followed by the most diverse positions—artists with little in common with Klimt, like Paul Cézanne or painters belonging to the *Briicke* group in Dresden, as well as more closely related artists such as Ferdinand Hodler, who transformed Lake Geneva into a boundless world landscape. If a section of nature were



Heinrich Kühn, *Hikers II*, c. 1915, bromide oil print

depicted close up, which was more rarely the case, then the tendency was to concentrate on the foreground scene without placing this in the distant background. Such pictorial effects, created especially from a raised vantage point or with the gaze focused toward the ground, were employed a number of times in early Klimt landscapes, such as *Farmhouse with Birch Trees* of 1900 (plate 11) or *Garden Landscape (Blooming Meadow)* of 1905–06 (plate 27).

By contrast, in early Cubism near and distant pictorial elements were tightly interwoven into an interlocking plane. It is interesting to compare Klimt's landscapes with the incunabula of this movement, Georges Braque's *Houses at L'Estaque* of 1908 (see p. 168), which appeared the same year as Klimt's first telescope paintings. A comparison with Daniel Henri Kahnweiler's 1909 photograph of this motif reveals how Braque arbitrarily plunged the background houses forwards and stacked them over rather than behind the buildings in the center, achieving a completely different effect from Klimt with his equally radical shortenings of distance. The Cubist picture lives from its diagonals, angles, and edges, continually suggesting volumes, which is something that Klimt avoided. In this respect the *Houses at Unterach* (plate 52) are considerably flatter than those at L'Estaque. That in spite of this they appear just as spatial as their Cubist counterparts is thanks to their higher degree of illusionism and faithful rendering of details. Even if Klimt did not paint an edge on the yellow house at the top center—in other words, did the exact opposite to the edge-obsessed Braque—Klimt's house does not appear to be ironed out into a flat plane

because the roof form automatically makes us add this edge in our mind's eye. If Braque's painting were devoid of edges then it really would appear totally flat. The much higher degree of illusionism that Klimt employs means that he is more reliant on nature's motif and can take fewer liberties in the composition than Braque. Accordingly he is dependent on optical aids like the telescope. On the other hand, the function of this planarity is completely different. In the case of Braque one does not so much look *into* a picture as *onto* a painted surface—it is well known that later Cubism increasingly emphasized the objecthood of the picture's support and made the final break with Alberti's definition of a panel painting as a "window to nature," ultimately achieving the degree of flatness that for Greenberg was the fulfillment of modernism. Conversely, in the case of Klimt, despite the reduced plasticity of the buildings and the flatter overall appearance in contrast with Braque, one has the sensation of looking *into* a relatively deep space. What Klimt could only achieve with the assistance of telescopic instruments is an illusion of depth, which paradoxically is compressed onto the picture's surface. Thus we feel a sense of great closeness and immediacy to these depictions, but at the same time are kept at a distance: the far-off image that has been drawn close retains this distance because of its two-dimensional appearance. This distance dialectic is not a trait of Braque's pictures or other exponents of flatness because these artists use less illusionism, and a planar painting can only be identified as a distant image through a relatively high degree of illusionism. In Braque's work illusionistic categories like closeness and distance have already become irrelevant.

This example again demonstrates that Greenberg's formalistic thesis—that abstract art did not emerge as an end in itself but as a result of artists' aspirations for ever increasing flatness—is not valid.⁴⁶ For Klimt, like for most of his important contemporaries, planarity does not hold any intrinsic value. The paradigm of the planar surface applies most to his Secessionist phase around 1900, shaped by fashion (and thus formalistic considerations), but certainly not to the works from the last decade of his life. The planarity of Klimt's landscapes is a side effect of the distance dialectic he aspired to but which was not his goal.



Georges Braque, *Houses at L'Estaque*, 1908,
Kunstmuseum Bern

If this had been the case, it could have been achieved much more easily.

A comparison with the most closely related landscapes by Egon Schiele (1890–1918) clearly demonstrates this. Schiele's *Stein on the Danube with Vineyard Terraces* of 1913 (*opposite*) shows a planar tier of buildings parallel to the picture on the opposite bank of a stretch of water—a typically Klimtesque motif. In this painting Schiele, like Klimt, was even relatively faithful to the motif and did not paint from memory or modify his subject as is so often the case in his landscapes.⁴⁷ The surface of the water in the foreground, the houses'

facades in the middle ground, and the vineyards in the background are in a single plane; aligning the spatial zones one behind the other has been transformed into stacking one on top of the other. This planarity may well build up a certain distance to the beholder but does not generate the dialectical relations of bringing the distant into the foreground, as found in Klimt's landscapes. Schiele dispenses with an atmospheric and hence illusionistic effect through the planar application of paint that moves beyond the Post-Impressionist system of dots. Without a shadow of a doubt, Schiele has arbitrarily leveled out his optical impression, whereas Klimt's landscapes always convincingly convey that his planar images correspond precisely with what he saw. Klimt's landscapes are to be deemed as equally exact "portraits" as his portrayals of Viennese society ladies.

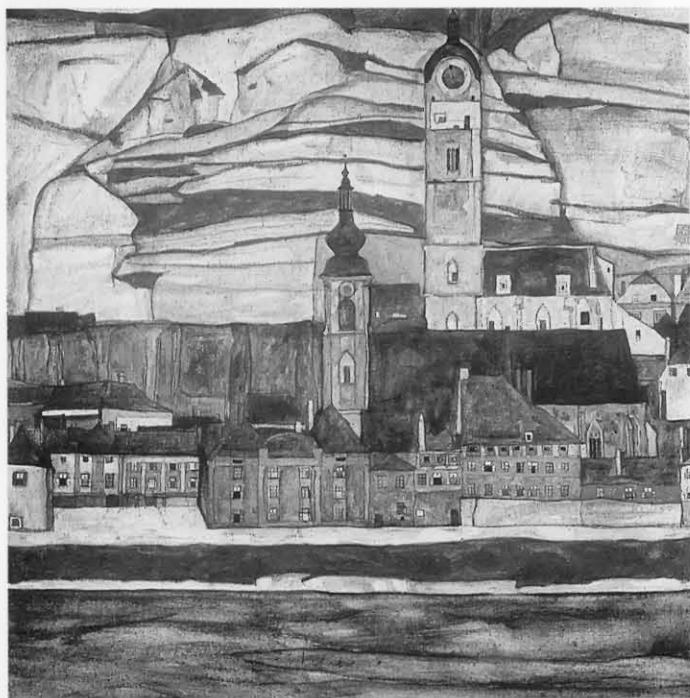
One could now raise the objection that this diagnosis of Klimt's motifs has merely shifted the question to another level without really offering a satisfactory answer. After all, what intention can be linked with the illusion of the distant being brought closer? It could be argued that this reflects an aesthetic need that was impressively caricatured by Mr. Hope. Yet this only touches on the frame of references and not the specific qualities of Klimt's art.

A look at Klimt's pictures with figures promises a solution to our problem. Generally the tendency is to regard the landscapes as strictly separate because in contrast to the figure compositions they are not set in a symbolist or mythological framework. This is true, but in their fundamental artistic and ideological purpose Klimt is following the same goal in both genres. One encounters a phenomenon similar to the landscapes, particularly in his numer-

ous erotic paintings and drawings.⁴⁸ Here, Klimt is well aware of how to capture sex appeal for the viewer: hitched up skirts, open blouses, ruffled blankets, stockings, and shoes revealing more than they conceal make the naked body appear undressed and provide exquisite surroundings that heighten the sensuality of exposed flesh. With their legs wide apart, Klimt's models sprawl across the canvas and are often rendered from a foreshortened view from above so that they seem to rise up as if weightless, directing gazes toward their open lap. Yet the male eyes are denied the final intrusion—which of course only

with mythological subjects in his paintings (*Danae*, see p. 170), but openly revealed in his private drawings.⁵⁰ Woman reduced to pure sexuality becomes a personification of erotic fulfillment per se, which does not seem diminished by any longing extending beyond herself. This sexuality defined as exclusively feminine—one needs only to think of Karl Kraus' assertion that "the sexual instinct of woman, certainly in the moment of use, becomes her sole preoccupation"⁵¹—Klimt always renders as a state of passive surrendering⁵² and dreamy reverie,⁵³ as a pre-conscious, even prenatal condition. Significant here is the embryonic pose of *Danae* and her series of uterine shroudings comprising sheet, veil, planes of color, and finally the square format. Even the most daring of depictions lacks the revolutionary explosives to destroy sexual taboos as Gert Mattenkott established: "his girlfriends or entranced masturbators do not really want to cause a scandal. They are pictures of a solipsistic self-immersed world where man can only participate as an onlooker and voyeur, lascivious and enthralled, but always left outside in fascinated suspense."⁵⁴

Much the same can be said of his landscapes. These are also pictures of a solipsistic self-immersed world where man—gazing into it with a telescope—is onlooker and voyeur. He may not be lascivious, yet he is enthralled and, above all, is always on the outside, divided from the observed object by the wide expanse of water that can only be traversed optically. The self-immersion of the landscape is complete. The strict orthogonal composition of Klimt's square formats⁵⁵ conveys tranquility and stability; man and beast have been excluded as potential disturbers of this peace; no breeze, no change in the weather, not even the movement of light and shadow is permitted; all brushstrokes convey only balance and rich repleteness, never expressiveness or dynamism. Klimt's landscapes seem to be detached from time, existing in a kind of dreamy passiveness. Their hermetic solipsism is due essentially to the telescope: the closely cropped image, the tight spatial layering, and the lack of foreground despite the impression of a closely viewed scene are all engendered by looking through a telescope. The same applies to the absence of a wide panorama, indeed the overall lack of spatial orientation. Hence the landscape appears neither distant nor near; it is purely and simply "elsewhere," only in artistic vision is it visible but never traversable and eludes all access. Through its technically produced illusionism, however, it keeps its promise that it really exists somewhere and as a result retains its powers of attraction and seduction in a transferred sense. With the



Egon Schiele, *Stein on the Danube with Vineyard Terraces* (large version), 1913, private collection

heightens the erotic tension. Seemingly unintentionally and unobserved, as if they were only being looked upon by an unnoticed voyeur from the distance, these women are self-absorbed. Distance is also created by the occasional ornamental contour that merges clothing and body into a large, planar form. A dialectic of artistic devices reduces tactile obscenity. As Nike Wagner noted, "Danae's large thighs... voluptuously fill the foreground of the picture, however, the flesh has hues of such transparent bluish, greenish yellows that they seem abstract like a hazy horizon."⁴⁹ Presentation and withdrawal, near and far merge together as in the landscapes. It is striking that Klimt frequently describes autoerotic acts, scantly concealed

"tunnel vision" of the telescope—and with this alone—Klimt could realize his world image based on immanence and concentrate entirely on closely cropped details of reality without degenerating into prosaic realism. The telescope effect serves here to convey a (paradoxical) feeling of transcendence that does not abandon immanence but evokes the sense of an earthly paradise. Even the most banal of objects from these rural surroundings acquire in Klimt's vision the aura of an enchanted, detached world.⁵⁶ This dreamy transfiguration of reality is reminiscent of Friedrich Nietzsche's "Apollonian dream state,"⁵⁷ described in *The Birth of Tragedy*, in which "the world of the day veils itself and a new world, clearer, more intelligible, more gripping than the other and yet more shadowy... is born before our eyes."⁵⁸ The distance brought closer by the telescope is "clearer, more intelligible" while at the same time "more shadowy" in its detached incorporeality. Klimt's use of a telescope is just as dialectical as its result. On the one hand, Klimt's technically transformed vision and his modernist "yearning for distance" seem very progressive. Indeed, in this respect he was akin to no other artist of his day, and this is a crucial factor determining the epochal significance of his landscapes. On the other hand, like with Mr. Hope, Klimt's art expresses a regressive attitude, a classic middle-class escape mechanism with romantic roots that extends to the television society and cyberworlds of the present day. The sensitive epicurean Klimt would like to get away: away from the hectic city of Vienna, away from the crumbling Habsburg monarchy, away from the turmoil of World War I. His art seeks that "elsewhere," that utopian place where, as he once wrote, "fate will let us enjoy pleasure."⁵⁹



Gustav Klimt, *Danae*, c. 1907/08, private collection

- ⁵ Cf. Henning Bock, "Einführung: Die Entstehung des 'Problems der Form,'" in *Adolf von Hildebrand: Gesammelte Schriften zur Kunst*, ed. Henning Bock (Cologne and Opladen, 1969), 17–40, here 37.
- ⁶ The different versions published between 1893 and 1913 are printed in *ibid.* In the following text the last version of 1903 is quoted (197–265). Regarding the complicated genesis of this work, for which Hildebrand had partially developed his theses as early as 1881, cf. Bock in *ibid.*, 24–33.
- ⁷ Cf. Hildebrand in *ibid.*, 206ff., 237.
- ⁸ Cf. *ibid.*, 206.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, 242.
- ¹⁰ Alois Riegler, "Die Stimmung als Inhalt der modernen Kunst," in *Gesammelte Aufsätze* (1899; reprint, Augsburg and Vienna, 1929), 28–39, here 29. For more detail see the essay by Peter Peer in this volume.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 30.
- ¹² Cf. Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London, 1980), 103.
- ¹³ Helmut Draxler, "Das reine Sehen, die Familie und der Tod: Versuch über die Sozialisierung des Blicks," *Texte zur Kunst* 1 (1990): 139–49, here 139f. Cf. Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," in *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Gregory Battcock (New York, 1968), 116–47.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.
- ¹⁵ Albert Robida, *Le vingtîème siècle* (Paris, 1883).
- ¹⁶ Cf. the many pictorial documents in Sven Thomas, "1879–1925: Utopien vom Fernsehen," in *TV-Kultur: Das Fernsehen in der Kunst seit 1879*, ed. Wulf Herzogenrath et al. (Dresden, 1997), 134–41.
- ¹⁷ Invention of the telegraph message by Samuel Morse in 1837–44; laying of the first cable connection between Great Britain and the United States in 1857–58.
- ¹⁸ Invention of the telephone by Alexander Graham Bell in 1872; patent and construction of an experimental line in 1876.
- ¹⁹ For the following data, cf. Joseph Hoppe, "Eine Chronologie 1843–1996," in *TV-Kultur* (see note 16 above), 19–23, here 19; Joseph Hoppe, "Wie das Fernsehen in die Apparate kam: Die Anfänge von Technik und Programm der Television," in *ibid.*, 24–47.
- ²⁰ Manuscript collection, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 201/17 (1–3), quoted from Christian M. Nebehay, *Gustav Klimt Dokumentation* (Vienna, 1969), 503.
- ²¹ Cf. Renate Vergeiner and Alfred Weidinger, "Gustav und Emilie: Bekanntschaft und Aufenthalte am Attersee," in *Inselräume: Teschner*,

1 Zugereist in diese Gegend, / Noch viel mehr als sehr vermögend, / In der Hand das Perspektiv, / Kam ein Mister namens Pief. / "Warum soll ich nicht beim Gehen" — / Sprach er — "in die Ferne sehen? / Schön ist es auch anderswo, / Und hier bin ich sowieso."

Wilhelm Busch, *Max and Moritz: With Many More Mischief-makers More or Less Human or Approximately Animal*, trans. and ed. H. Arthur Klein (New York, 1962), 110.

2 Whereas Busch uses anti-Semitic clichés in chapter 5 in a very superficial way.

3 Clement Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," *Art and Literature* no. 4 (Spring 1965): 193–201, quoted from Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, eds., *Art in Theory 1900–1990: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, 3rd ed. (Oxford and Cambridge Mass., 1992), 754–60, here 758.

4 Cf. *ibid.*, 755ff.

- Klimt und Flöge am Attersee*, exh. cat., 2nd ed. (1st ed. 1988), (Seewalchen am Attersee, 1989), 5–27.
- 22 Cf. Nebehay, *Gustav Klimt Dokumentation*, 456, n. 4.
- 23 Johannes Dobai, "Die Landschaft in der Sicht von Gustav Klimt: Ein Essay," *Klimt-Studien: Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Galerie* 22/23, nos. 66/67 (1978): 241–72; reprinted in Johannes Dobai, *Gustav Klimt: Die Landschaften* (Salzburg, 1987), 32f.
- Klimt wrote in a letter from Attersee to Marie Zimmermann at the beginning of August 1903: "On my first day here I didn't start working straight away, ... early in the morning, during the day and in the evening I looked for motifs to paint in my landscapes with a 'viewing frame,' which is a hole cut into a cardboard lid, and I found much—or you could also say nothing." Quoted from Christian M. Nebehay, "Gustav Klimt schreibt an eine Liebe," *Klimt-Studien*, ibid., 101–18, here 108f. With regard to the ivory viewing frame cf. Nebehay, *Gustav Klimt Dokumentation*, 452f.
- 24 Johannes Dobai, "Katalog der Gemälde," in Fritz Novotny and Johannes Dobai, *Gustav Klimt* (Salzburg, 1967), 308, 372.
- 25 Fritz Novotny, "Die Landschaft," in *Gustav Klimt*, (Salzburg, 1967), 53–70, here 60.
- 26 Ibid., 64.
- 27 Nebehay, *Gustav Klimt Dokumentation*, 452.
- 28 The following section is a revised version of the chapter "Distanz-Dialektik" from my essay, "Aspekte der Landschaft bei Gustav Klimt," in *Inselräume*, 40–65, here 54–58.
- 29 Marie-José Liechtenstein, "Gustav Klimt und seine oberösterreichischen Salzkammergutlandschaften," *Oberösterreichische Heimatblätter* 5, no. 3/4 (1951): 297–317, here 300; Nebehay, *Gustav Klimt Dokumentation*, 452; Dobai, *Landschaften*, 31.
- 30 After 1900 Klimt declined a major commission, stating: "I have no other means of sustaining to some degree the peace and quiet I need" (Gustav Klimt to Fritz Waerndorfer, undated letter, "Unbekannte Briefe Gustav Klimts. Wie der grosse Maler schuf, mitgeteilt von Karl Moser," *Neues Wiener Journal*, Jan. 3, 1932, 16; quoted from Nebehay, *Gustav Klimt Dokumentation*, 390). At the same time he stopped organizing exhibitions and in Vienna led an increasingly reclusive existence. He was usually surly to passers-by who met him when he was painting outdoors; see for example Irene Hölder-Weineck's account (quoted in Vergeiner and Weidinger, "Gustav und Emilie," 13). Finally Klimt's accommodation at Attersee between 1900 and 1916 reveals a growing need for peace and seclusion.
- 31 Our discovery was ignored by scholars for a long time. We were, after all, only students and not acknowledged Klimt specialists. In addition the exhibition catalogue (see note 21) did not find its way into many public libraries, although two editions were published.
- 32 Cf. Alfred Weidinger, "Neues zu den Landschaftsbildern Gustav Klimts" (thesis, Salzburg University, 1992), 131ff., 166.
- 33 Cf. Klimt's daily routine described in a letter to Marie Zimmermann dated August 1902, quoted in Nebehay, "Gustav Klimt schreibt an eine Liebe," 109f.
- 34 Cf. Weidinger, "Neues zu den Landschaftsbildern," 111ff., 137ff.; Alfred Weidinger, "Der Landschaftsmaler," in *Gustav Klimt*, ed. Toni Stooss and Christoph Doswald, exh. cat. (Stuttgart: Kunsthaus Zürich, 1992), 53–71, here 56.
- 35 Weidinger, "Neues zu den Landschaftsbildern," 111f.
- 36 Verena Lobisser kindly informed me that *Schloss Kämmer am Attersee II*, for example, was painted from the emperor's monument above the village. It was only from here that he could see the roof formation as it appears in the painting and for this he would, however, have required a telescope.
- 37 Cf. Wagner, "Aspekte der Landschaft," 58; Weidinger, "Der Landschaftsmaler," 54.
- 38 Cf. Wolfgang G. Fischer, *Gustav Klimt und Emilie Flöge: Genie und Talent*, *Freundschaft und Besessenheit* (Vienna, 1987), 95; Vergeiner and Weidinger, "Gustav und Emilie," 15.
- 39 For example, in the posthumous portraits of Ria Munk painted between 1911 and 1918; cf. Tobias G. Natter, "Female Portraits," in *Klimt's Women*, ed. Tobias G. Natter and Gerbert Frodl, exh. cat., English ed. (Vienna: Österreichische Galerie Belvedere; Cologne, 2000), 76–147, here 140.
- 40 Cf. for this and the following facts Wolfgang Baier, *Quellendarstellungen zur Geschichte der Photographie*, 4th ed. (Munich, 1980), 313f. (with sources).
- 41 *Bulletin du Photo Club de Paris* (1898): 353–63, quoted from Baier, ibid., 314.
- 42 C. Puyo, *Photographische Mitteilungen* 42 (1905): 339, quoted from Baier, ibid.
- 43 Cf. Ulrich Knapp, Heinrich Kühn: *Photographien* (Salzburg and Vienna, 1988), 12–17.
- 44 Cf. Christian M. Nebehay, *Ver Sacrum 1898–1903* (London, 1977), 255, 268, 291; *Ver Sacrum* (1902), 1; 4:25ff.; 7:30ff.; 10:31.
- 45 Cf. Natter, "Female Portraits," 95ff.
- 46 Cf. Greenberg, "Modernist Painting," 756.
- 47 Cf. Erwin Mitsch, *Egon Schiele*, 4th ed. (Munich, 1981), 42.
- 48 Cf. for more detail Anselm Wagner, "Ich schliesse mich selbst ein: Zur hermetischen Erotik Gustav Klins," in *Inselräume*, 79–83.
- 49 Nike Wagner, *Geist und Geschlecht: Karl Kraus und die Erotik der Wiener Moderne* (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 48.
- 50 Cf. Wagner, "Ich schliesse mich selbst ein," 81f. Independently of myself, Laura Arici reached the same conclusion that Klimt's *Danae* is a metaphor for female masturbation; cf. Laura Arici, "Danae," in *Gustav Klimt*, ed. Toni Stooss and Christoph Doswald, exh. cat. (Stuttgart: Kunsthaus Zürich, 1992), 146. On the depiction of female masturbation in general cf. Laura Arici, "Schwanengesang in Gold: Der Kuss—eine Deutung," in ibid., 43–51, here 47f.
- 51 Karl Kraus, "Der Fall Riehl" (1906), quoted from Werner Hofmann, *Gustav Klimt und die Wiener Jahrhundertwende* (Salzburg, 1971), 35.
- 52 In accordance with this sexual dualism that looks back on a long Western tradition, the Viennese sexual psychologist Otto Weininger asserted that for women in general, "waiting for a man... is simply waiting for the moment when she can be completely passive" (Otto Weininger, *Geschlecht und Charakter*, 2nd ed. (Vienna and Leipzig, 1904), 356, quoted from Hofmann, ibid., 32).
- 53 Thus Klimt's protagonists who surrender themselves to the "stream of life" mostly have their eyes closed. Apart from *Danae* and *Leda*, other prominent examples are: the faculty paintings (1900–03), *The Kiss* (1907–08), *The Virgin* (1913), *Death and Life* (before 1911/16) and *The Bride* (1917–18).
- 54 Gert Mattenkrott, "Figurenwerfen. Versuch über Klins Zeichnungen," in *Gustav Klimt*, exh. cat. (Hanover, 1984), 27–35, here 28.
- 55 On the aesthetics and symbolism of the square in Klimt's landscapes, cf. Wagner, "Aspekte der Landschaft," 50ff.
- 56 Cf. Hofmann, *Wiener Jahrhundertwende*, 16.
- 57 On the significance of Nietzsche's Apollonian theory for Klimt's landscapes, cf. Wagner, "Aspekte der Landschaft," 60ff. Hitherto Nietzsche's Dionysian theory has been predominantly employed to explain Klimt's faculty paintings. See, for example, Hans Bisanz, "Ornament und Askese: Wiener Stilkunst, Schiele, Kokoschka," in *Ornament und Askese im Zeitgeist des Wien der Jahrhundertwende* (Vienna, 1985), 130–41, here 136; William MacGrath, "Les reveurs dionisiaques," in *Vienne 1880–1938: L'apocalypse joyeuse*, exh. cat. (Paris, 1986), 172–79, here 178; Carl E. Schorske, *Fin-de-siècle Vienna: Politics and Culture* (New York, 1981), 228ff. Schorske relates Klimt's *Philosophy* to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.
- 58 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Douglas Smith (Oxford, 2000), 52.
- 59 Gustav Klimt to Emilie Flöge, postcard, March 1916, quoted from Fischer, *Gustav Klimt und Emilie Flöge*, 166.