

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Jung Journal
Culture & Psyche

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/ujun20

Crystalizing the Universe in Geometrical Figures

Diagrammatic Abstraction in the Creative Works of Hilma af Klint and C. G. Jung

Marybeth Carter

To cite this article: Marybeth Carter (2020) Crystalizing the Universe in Geometrical Figures, Jung Journal, 14:3, 147-167, DOI: 10.1080/19342039.2020.1781530

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/19342039.2020.1781530

Published online: 31 Aug 2020.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 1525

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=ujun20

Check for updates

Crystalizing the Universe in Geometrical Figures

Diagrammatic Abstraction in the Creative Works of Hilma af Klint and C. G. Jung

MARYBETH CARTER

As a self-regulating system, the autonomous nature of the psyche is such that it strives to get our attention—often through recurring dream figures, spontaneous visions, or unexpected life experiences.[1] We can take notice of what it's telling us—or not. If we don't, the psyche may pester us until we get the message. Psyche got my attention in 2018—the year I entered the Control Phase of my analytic training. I had an unexpected opportunity to travel to New York City and followed my inner prompt to go, but I was not certain why. Sure enough, prior to my visit, I heard about the Hilma af Klint solo exhibition at the Guggenheim New York and was urged to see it. Then I was given the opportunity to write an art review about the exhibit (Carter 2019). By the time I stepped into the museum, I was intrigued by the story of Hilma af Klint and became mesmerized by her boldly painted forms and bright colors. Even so, I was slow to understand the meaning behind her art. For over eighteen months, I delved into exploring her life and creative work through a Jungian lens. I developed a sense of kinship with af Klint, the seeker, as I engaged in the solitary inner journey of researching and writing about her and Jung's theories. By trusting my inner prompt to take the trip to New York City, I crossed a threshold into a realm that allowed me to contemplate the intersection of consciousness, the unconscious, and the self-regulating nature of the psyche—in other words, the process of individuation.

I deepened in my understanding that individuation can occur despite or because of the cultural context of the individual. For instance, this article is being published in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, with many of us living under the directives of governmental stay-at-home orders. As I researched and wrote this article, transitioned my practice from in-person to online, and shifted my teaching of graduate school classes to Zoom, I continued to engage in the process of analytic training, which requires an engagement with self-development, especially during the Control Stage. Sheltering in my solitary study, my appreciation for af Klint and Jung grew for their commitment to extensive periods of time alone to connect with the psychic depths stimulated by their times.

Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche, Volume 14, Number 3, pp. 147–167, Print ISSN 1934-2039, Online ISSN 1934-2047.
© 2020 C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco. DOI: 10.1080/19342039.2020.1781530.



Hilma af Klint in her Studio
(Photograph by permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)

The fact is that every seeker of consciousness does so within the context of a generational age. And every generation faces challenges as well as opportunities. The starkness of this reality along with other realities of life have been described as "the world-as-it-is . . . compassion and brutality,

transcendence, and primitivity, marked by generosity and gratitude, envy, and greed."[2] Despite, or because of, the suffering inherent in the experience of these oppositional dynamics, psychological breakthroughs can be forged that create an emergence of a "third"—a state of unity from the seeming separateness of duality, as Jung theorized using the language of the alchemists.

This "third" state is known as the *androgyne,* which is often depicted in image as the union of the male and the female—valued in alchemy as the hermaphrodite. As we know, in Jungian psychology, this concept and its image suggests an integration of polarized aspects that brings a state of equilibrium between the conscious and the unconscious aspects of a person's psyche—a new state of consciousness not previously experienced. How does one communicate about and portray such a significant state of being? Af Klint and Jung did so by utilizing geometrical diagrammatic abstraction to tell a story of their insights in the form of universal mathematical forms.

An Introduction to Hilma af Klint

The audience for this article is well-aware of C. G. Jung; however, Hilma af Klint is a relative newcomer on the current art and psyche scene, even though she and Jung lived at roughly the same time. A contemporary of Jung (1875–1961), Hilma af Klint (1862–1944) was a Swedish artist who formally trained at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. She was in the first few classes of women allowed to formally study art along with male students. She graduated with honors and was awarded a studio. Her initial work tended toward landscapes, portraits, and botanical illustrations, which was the norm for her time, and she regularly exhibited. In private, however, she began painting abstract works before the concept of "abstract art" was coined. Despite af Klint's attempts to show her abstract works, most exhibitors, except one in London in 1928, preferred her landscapes and illustrations.

Some of her family members and female peers considered her abstract art to be offensive. Even Rudolf Steiner, who visited af Klint in her studio in 1908, thought that af Klint should



Hilma af Klint, *Spring Landscape—Scene from the Bay of Lomma,* 1892, Oil on canvas (Provided by The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)

not use mediumship as a method for painting and that no one should see her abstract art for at least fifty years. Af Klint did not note why Steiner made this suggestion; however, despite such negative reactions, she continued to paint and a few friends provided her with the means and space to pursue her painting. At the end of her life, af Klint archived her work and stored it at her nephew's home. She gave him strict instructions not to sell her art nor to show it until twenty years after her death, which would be the mid-1960s. This delay would coincide with her nephew's retirement so he would have time to take on the formidable task of arranging for the permanent preservation of her work. After some time, her family established a foundation for af Klint's art with the *first* posthumous showing of two abstract paintings that were part of an exhibit at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) in 1985 (forty-one years after her death). Since then, her remarkable art has been shown in various locations in Europe and at the solo exhibition of her work at the Guggenheim New York, which broke the museum's record as the most highly attended exhibit in its history.

A seeker in her own time, af Klint endured gender discrimination in her professional career, witnessed scientific breakthroughs, such as the atom and the x-ray, sought knowledge through exposure to the world's religions, and survived the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918–1919 as well as the two World Wars. The influence of her family and culture combined with her encounters with the transpersonal shaped her view of human and cultural development that she expressed through over one thousand paintings. One influence was the prevalence of mediumship and Spiritualism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Europe and the United States. Af Klint actively participated in them as a means to explore unknown realms.

Mediumship, Trances, and Spirits: Innovative Encounters with the Transpersonal

Seances and a connection to the transpersonal greatly influenced af Klint—and Jung as well. In 1879, af Klint began participating in seances. By 1880, she had also become interested in Theosophy and Spiritualism, which her biographer Julia Voss suggested was af Klint's form of liberation theology that supported her on a path other than the cultural norm of wife and mother (*Beyond the Visible* 2019). Spiritualism is a practice wherein participants communicate with spirits of the dead with an intent "to unite the natural and the supernatural realms and to bring the dead into conversation with the living" (Shreve 2018). Much like mindfulness meditation today, Spiritualism and mediumship were popular at the time, especially with artists, and af Klint practiced them while attending the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Stockholm. Once she had her studio, af Klint formed a group of five women called *De Fem* ("five"), who regularly engaged in trance work. The trance experiences manifested dialogue and images, including several distinct spirit personalities as well as some that collectively called themselves "The High Ones." Alternatively, af Klint referred to these personalities as "guides."

De Fem members regularly met to evoke trance states that induced visions and communications with the guides that the women noted through automatic drawing and journal writing. In 1904, one of the spirits, Amaliel, extended to several members of the group an

"art commission" that would use the process of *automatic painting:* a painting process that involves deep spiritual states. Each of the women in De Fem declined the offer for fear of going mad, except af Klint. She spent twelve months cleansing, eating a vegetarian diet, and preparing to engage in this special task, which alienated her from social gatherings and meals with her family (*Beyond the Visible* 2019). Then, for the next nine years (from 1906 to 1915), af Klint engaged in automatic painting guided by the High Ones, creating 193 paintings that became collectively known as the *Paintings for the Temple*. After the automatic painting period, from 1915 to the end of her life in 1944, af Klint shifted to intentionally creating art that explored the many themes that emerged in the discourses with her guides.

Meanwhile, in 1898, nineteen years after af Klint first began attending seances and engaging with trance states, Jung was attending seances while in medical school (Main 1997). He probably participated at an even earlier age because his mother and cousin functioned as mediums for seances held in his home (Hillman 1976), and Jung recounted paranormal incidents that occurred during his childhood in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1965). Jung's interest in the paranormal, including participation in seances, apparently lasted for at least thirty more years (Charet 1993; Jung 1905/1976, CW 18). His doctoral dissertation was a case study of a medium in which he hypothesized that the "deceased spirits" that contacted the medium were not spirits of deceased people at all. He hypothesized the spirits were subconscious split-off parts of the medium's consciousness, which he called *complexes* (1902/1970, CW 1). Jung initially posited that complexes consisted of a dynamic that interfaced consciousness and the unconscious, with the latter composed of both repressed as well as collective material that he called the *collective unconscious*. Jung considered these dynamics as functioning in a closed system, which he labeled as the *psyche*.

Later, Jung posited that the psyche might not be an entirely closed system, suggesting that the psyche, in addition to the repressed and the collective unconscious contents, might also contain complexes or contents that derived from some unknown parts outside of the psychic system—that is, there might be an "uncomprehended absolute object" that affects and influences us (1965, 351–352). Accordingly, although there might be contents from a transpsychic realm that influence the psychic realm, we may only be able to perceive and understand these transpsychic contents through the lens of the closed psychic system. These transpsychic phenomena may transition from the unconscious to consciousness, or directly to consciousness, and, just as with the unconscious contents when under the right conditions, spark a transcendent function—"a psychic function that arises from the tension between consciousness and the unconscious and supports their union" (Sharp 2019). The experience of this integration of polarized aspects often corresponds with a new state of consciousness, a sense of rebirth and renewal, as well as an enhanced state of wellbeing.

By pursuing practices that integrated polarized psychic aspects, Jung transformed his instinctual nature by engaging with his fantasies to encounter the unconscious and transpsychic contents with his consciousness, thereby engaging the process of mutual transformation within the psychic system. The figures that Jung met during his confrontation with the unconscious, which occurred after publishing his book *Psychology of the Unconscious* in 1912, paralleled af Klint's relationship with her "guides." Although many figures emerged through



C. G. Jung, Philemon in *The Red Book,* from Liber Secundus, page 154 (Reprinted from *The Red Book* by C. G. Jung. Copyright © 2009 by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung. Used with Permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. All rights reserved.)

active imagination sessions (that is, the process of working with images from dreams and fantasies) the imaginal figure of Philemon figured prominently for Jung, as did the figure of Amaliel, a being of higher consciousness for af Klint (Bashkoff 2018, 19). Jung maintained a relationship with Philemon throughout his life:

> Philemon and other figures of my fantasies brought home to me the crucial insight that there are things in the psyche which I do not produce, but which produce themselves and have their own life. Philemon represented a force which was not myself. In my fantasies, I held conversations with him, and he said things which I had not consciously thought. For I observed clearly that it was he who spoke, not I. (Jung 1965, 183)

From his encounter with Philemon and the figures in his various fantasies, Jung distinguished the "I" that thinks and perceives as well as other aspects within his psychic construct, the totality of which he called the *Self*. Similar to af Klint, Jung engaged in the automatic drawing of mandalas. He also experienced material dictated to him by a figure from the archetypal realm who identified himself as a Gnostic named Basilides that led to the teachings (and book) called *The Seven Sermons to the Dead* (M. Stein 2010/1998, 154). Jung learned to be a witness to these psychological dynamics and to distinguish thoughts, emotions, attitudes, psychic contents, and more through self-observation. He channeled this information into an extensive oeuvre of creative visual and written expression, including scholarly presentations, papers, and books.

Not being versed in psychology, and with Jung's analytical psychology in its infancy at the time, af Klint's paradigm for categorizing this new form of connection to the unknown, and of the novel artistic form it evoked, would necessarily be interpreted through the Spiritualism and Theosophical context available to her at the time. Af Klint developed her unique approach to the figures she called "the guides" and the meaning they provided, and through their influence, she painted hundreds of paintings. Criticism of af Klint's method of work, and even of the artwork itself, prevails with contemporary art scholars, just as it did during her lifetime with Steiner and other contemporaries. For instance, the art critic Birgit Pelzer, in her essay entitled "Idealities" (2005), negatively judged af Klint for her use of trance as a method of painting. Pelzer regarded af Klint's engagement with mediumistic trance states as one that passively versus intentionally conveyed images rendered into creative works, and that af Klint *only*

created "spiritual art" (per af Klint's description of her work), not real art. Similarly, Pontus Hulten, art director at Moderna Museet from 1958–1973, Stockholm's museum of modern art, summarily rejected the af Klint Family Foundation's offer to gift the entire Hilma af Klint collection to the museum once he learned that she participated in seances (*Beyond the Visible* 2019). Later, the museum changed its stance and now retains several of her works generously deposited by the Hilma af Klint Family Foundation.

Pelzer's viewpoint about af Klint's "passive" approach echoes a stereotype of mediumship prevalent since the nineteenth century. Although men predominated as mediums in the late 1800s to early 1900s and were active in Spiritualism during af Klint's time, the role became associated with women and girls who were considered to be passive vessels (Moore 1975). Laurence Moore wrote that at the time of af Klint's life, the cultural prejudice toward female mediums advanced the negative stereotype that

> Mediums were weak in the masculine qualities of will and reason and strong in the female qualities of intuition and nervousness. They were impressionable (i.e., responsive to outside influences) and extremely sensitive. Above all they were passive. After all, it was queried, what spirit could manifest anything through a medium whose own personality was strongly assertive? The success of spirit communication depended on the ability of mediums to give up their own identity to become the instruments of others. (202–203)

This characterization of feminine qualities as passive and, as a consequence, women and girls being ripe for mediumship, is an unfounded stereotype toward women of the post-Romantic and Victorian cultures that, even today, remains a lingering prejudice toward the feminine and the transpersonal.

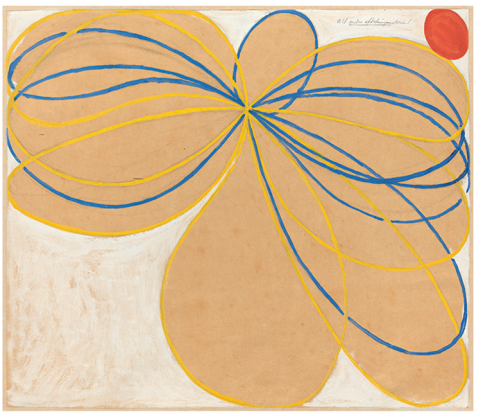
As an alternate viewpoint, Moore's detailed sociological argument depicted mediumship in the nineteenth century as a form of women's empowerment (1975). He advanced the perspective that at a time in Europe and the United States when most women were barred from holding leadership positions in political, social, or religious organizations, serving as a medium provided an opportunity to more fully participate in society. Mediums had their own businesses and made their own money. Mediums were sought out by others for their abilities and knowledge. Mediums were powerful because they were in communication with invisible realms that others were not able to access on their own, which was especially relevant and exciting given the scientific discoveries at the time of the invisible worlds of atoms, subatomic particles, and x-rays. This empowerment coincided with a rise in the number of single women who developed other forms of providing for themselves, including making and selling art (*Beyond the Visible* 2019).

Building on the idea of mediumship as a form of women's empowerment, it is possible to interpret af Klint's use of mediumship and trances as ways in which she accessed novel points of view in order to advance her life and her new form of art. Art scholar Briony Fer's position is that there are multiple ways to consider af Klint and her abstract work as not only relegated "to the esoteric theosophical meanings and functions" by which Pelzer condemned her (Fer 2015). As if anticipating or already receiving criticism of her method, af Klint (1908) noted in her journal, "It was not the case that I was to blindly obey the High Lords of the Mysteries but that I was to *imagine* [italics are mine] that they were always standing by my side" (Bashkoff 2018, 21). af Klint utilized trance to achieve transpersonal states that helped her access new methods of painting and new content to paint.

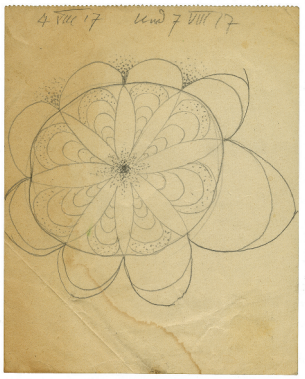
The art historian Jadranka Ryle advocated that af Klint's engagement in trance work and the exploration of the "transcendent beyond" for the creation of her art reflect her sociological and political views, not just her spiritual and artistic interests (2019). Ryle suggested that a socially radical af Klint engaged in mediumistic and other activities with the intent to challenge the artistic and social environment of the post-Romantic revival popular in Sweden and much of Europe. It is an intriguing perspective and is plausible given the subject matter and radical innovations in af Klint's art. She was a pioneer who joined the first classes of women studying alongside men at Stockholm's Royal Academy of Fine Arts, earned the rights to a studio, and engaged in Theosophy and Spiritualism, which promoted female leadership and women's rights. It is reasonable to think that af Klint was interested in advancing an alternative social perspective to post-Romantic Swedish thought of the late 1900s. Ryle contends that within the creative space of her studio, a veritable "room of her own," af Klint's intent was to make a statement about these cultural norms and, ultimately, influence cultural mores. As evidenced in her art, it is conceivable that af Klint sought a greater understanding of the feminine, the masculine, and their relationship in evoking individual and cultural development despite the view of male critics toward women artists "when they showed innovation and progressive aesthetic ideas" (11). These innovative, progressive ideas began to emerge not only as symbolic expressions, but also as paintings of geometrical abstractions that represented states of being that are reflective of various states of consciousness.

The Geometrical Diagrammatic Figure as a State of Consciousness

Jung and af Klint both utilized geometrical diagrams to convey integrated, balanced psychological states. They selected the circle—one of many forms of geometric diagram, often expressed in their concepts as mandalas. When af Klint began the automatic painting of the cycle of paintings called *Paintings for the Temple,* which was "commissioned" by the spirit guide Amaliel, she was told that



Hilma af Klint, *Group V, The Seven-Pointed Star, No. 1,*1908, Tempora, gouache, and graphite on paper mounted on canvas. (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)



C. G. Jung, Mandala sketch, 1917, *The Red Book,* from Appendix A, page 361 (Reprinted from *The Red Book* by C. G. Jung. Copyright © 2009 by The Foundation of the Works of C. G. Jung. Used with Permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. All rights reserved.)

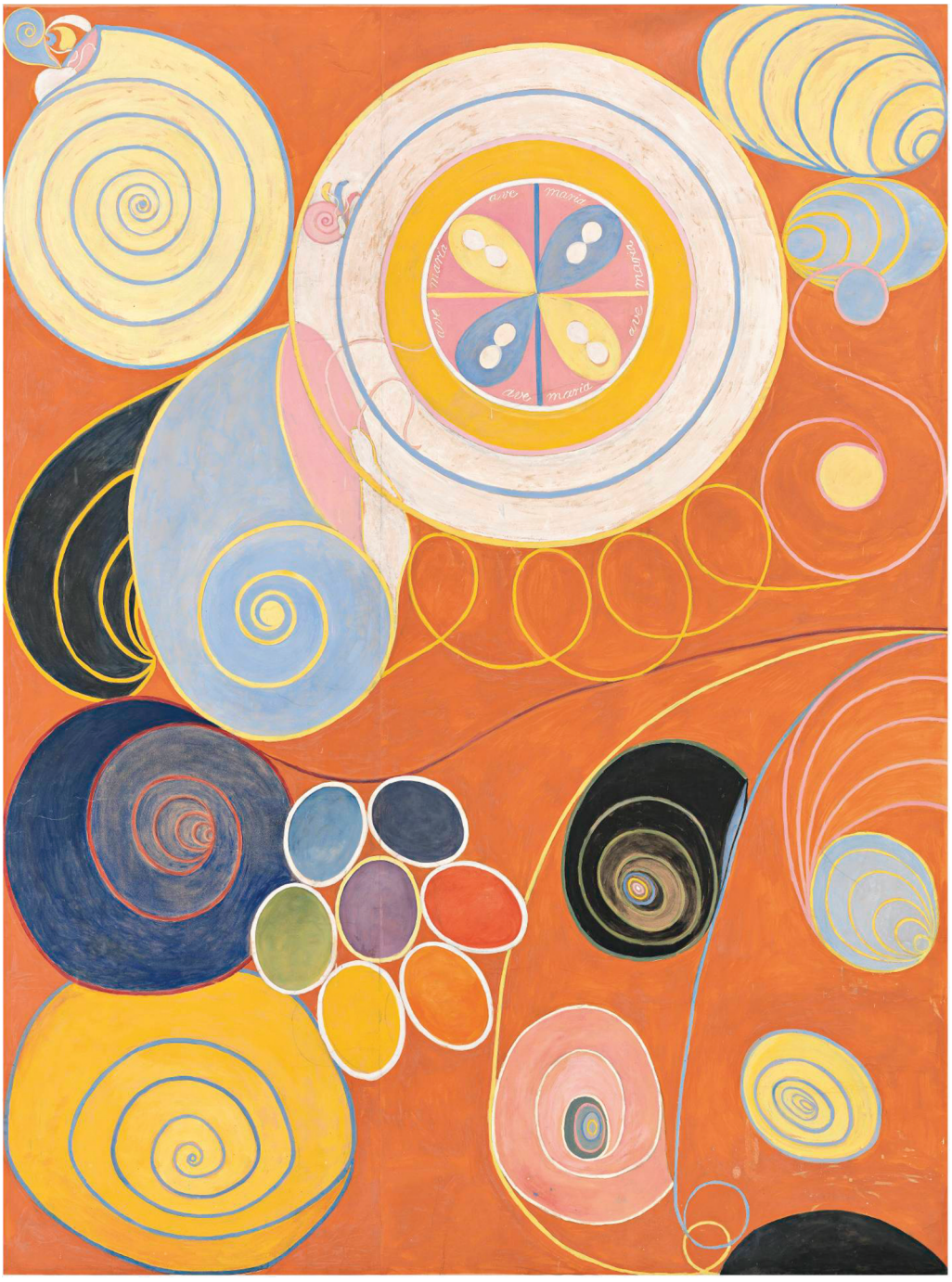
she was a pioneer and needed to utilize an "uncomprehended working method" (af Klint, 1908). Af Klint wrote in her journal about the process in the following way, "The pictures were painted directly through me, without any preliminary drawings, and with great force. I had no idea what the paintings were supposed to depict. Nevertheless, I worked swiftly and surely, without changing a single brush stroke" (Dias 2017). In addition to the circle, more complex geometrical forms emerged during af Klint's automatic painting sessions of *The Ten Largest* (1907).

Throughout the series of *The Ten Largest,* and especially in the final two paintings, called *Old Age,* geometric forms depict states of consciousness. In this way af Klint, as did Jung, conveyed human development. Both af Klint and Jung, like the alchemists before them, proposed that this process of development emerges through a rhythm of polarity that resolves in an integrated new state that is a "third" position, which af Klint depicted using the symbols of the spiral (snails and curved lines) and in various geometric forms (circles and crosses, squares and cubes, triangles and polyhedrons).

The Ten Largest paintings contain examples of these geometric forms (see pages 156 and 157 for examples of these paintings). The paintings are tempera on paper mounted on canvas. They represent the "four stages of life and humanity's connections to the universe" (Bashkoff 2018, 23–24): "Childhood," "Youth," "Adulthood," and "Old Age." Each of the paintings is larger than 8′ × 7′. Standing at only five feet tall, af Klint innovated painting these larger-than-life pieces by laying the canvases on the ground. Keeping with the number four associated with the stages of life, each painting was to be painted in four days (Bashkoff 2018, 23). We see flower images that double as mandalas that celebrate the division of one into two, two into three, and from three into the symbolism of four as in the *Axiom of Maria* (Jung 1936/1968, CW 12, ¶209), an alchemical precept that describes "the dynamic unfolding from unconsciousness, to the emergence of one-sided consciousness, to the cognition of the opposites of consciousness and unconsciousness, and finally to the integration of duality into a new conscious attitude through the process of individuation" (Carter 2019, 172).

The number seven is repeated throughout the series. In the *Youth* paintings, snails, which represent the spiral of individuation and the unity of the androgyne, appear, symbolizing balance, growth, and infinity. In this way, the snails indicate not only the advancement of chronological age but also the optimum process of psychological development over the lifespan. In *No. 6, Adulthood,* the syllable *Wu* arrives in the work. For af Klint, *Wu* is the "essence of all human spirit" (*Beyond the Visible* 2019), representing the union of male and female (androgyne) integrated with one another. The next to last canvas, *No. 9, Old Age,* has a marked decrease in the intensity of the pink paint color, which symbolizes the fading life force before death (*Beyond the Visible* 2019). This painting also has an orderliness in the design of the figures on the canvas rather than the organic free-form symbols that graced the previous eight paintings.

In the final painting, *No. 10,* which is also entitled *Old Age,* it is easy to imagine that a new state of "being," a new psychological state, has been achieved, which af Klint depicted through the geometric form of the square. Within the square, the white blocks form a cross and the four-color blocks form a quaternity (*quaternion*) that suggests dynamic wholeness, not stasis, due to the symbolism of the number four and of the cross within it. In *Mysterium Coniunctionis* Jung stressed that the *quaternion* and the cross are alternate forms of the circle (1963, CW 14). The circle, a geometric symbol of the Self, revolves continuously between duality and union, death and rebirth, creation and resolution. Thus, in painting *No. 10, Old Age,* perhaps af Klint is suggesting



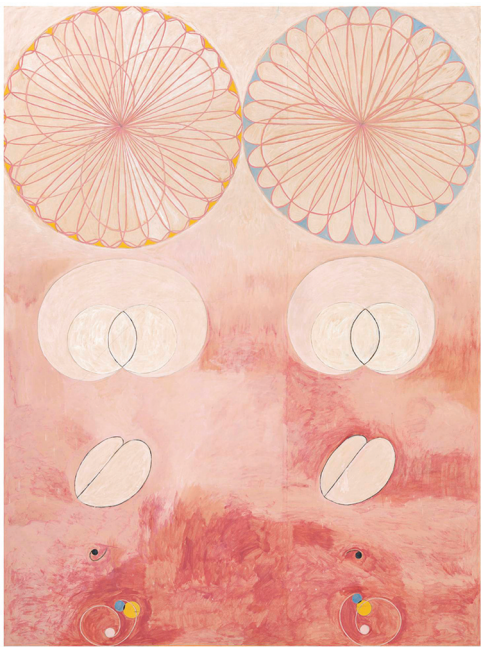
Hilma af Klint, ***Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 3, Youth, 1907,*** **Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas**
(By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)



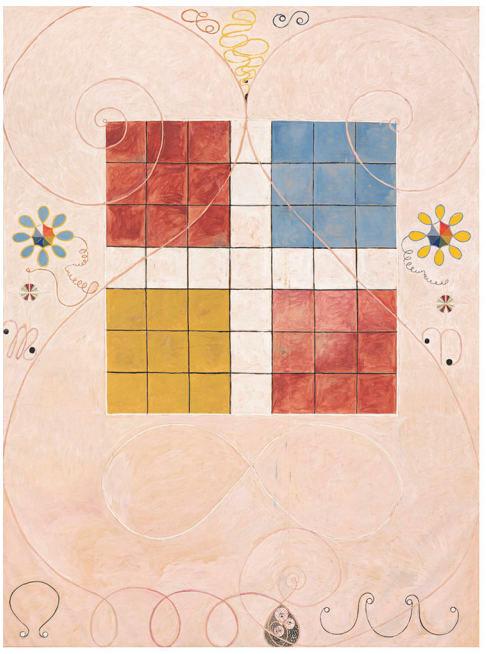
Hilma af Klint, *Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 6, Adulthood, 1907,* Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)



Hilma af Klint, *Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 7, Adulthood, 1907,* Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)



Hilma af Klint, *Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 9, Old Age, 1907,* Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)



Hilma af Klint, *Group IV, The Ten Largest, No. 10, Old Age, 1907,* Tempera on paper, mounted on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)

a state of dynamic consciousness and a type of wholeness achievable in individuals. Additionally, a social "utopian" culture is a possibility for all if more of us were to achieve this state through individuation.

The Swan Series: Process and States

Hilma af Klint painted *The Ten Largest* in 1907 and continued engaging in the method of automatic painting through 1915. It was in 1914–1915, the beginning of World War I, that af Klint, now fifty-two years old, deepened her exploration of the development of consciousness in *The Swan* series (*SUW/UW* series). Jung was thirty-nine years old at this time and had recently published *Psychology of the Unconscious*. He would have just completed his "confrontation with the unconscious," which he recorded in the black diaries that he later synthesized and illustrated in *The Red Book*. *The Swan* series is comprised of twenty-four paintings of oil on canvas, each of which is approximately 5' × 5' in size. Significantly, af Klint did not entitle the series *The Swans,* plural, but *The Swan,* indicating that despite the presence of multiple swans in the course of the series, the process is of a singular entity undergoing transformation. The paintings in this series explore the dynamics of duality, balance, conflict, union, and evolution of consciousness. As in *The Ten Largest,* af Klint utilized "highly abstracted" geometric images that are diagrammatic, nonrepresentational conceptions of nondualistic states (Bashkoff 2018).

The series begins with two representations of swans—one black and one white—that oppose each other, yet relate. There is a sense of balance between them that contrasts with the dynamic tension in the painting by which af Klint genderized the swans to convey duality more fully. She purposely chose black and yellow to symbolize masculine, and white and blue to symbolize feminine: af Klint used these colors in the beaks and feet of the swans. Ryle (2019) argued that the purposeful



Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan No. 1, 1915*, Oil on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)



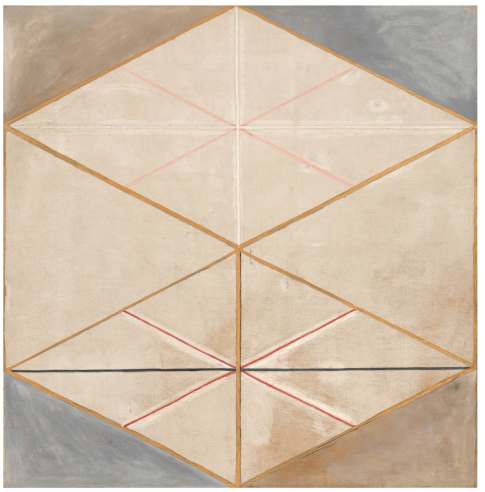
Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan No. 9, 1915*, Oil on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)

use of the representational image of the swan, a male-identified symbol and emblem of Sweden's Nordic mythology, is af Klint's reconstruction of the male-dominated culture of her time as she, her sister, and many women worked for suffrage and other forms of freedom for women. The transformative nature of the swan through the series of paintings evokes an abstraction that resolves in a "balanced cuboid form and symmetrical colour arrangements" (Ryle 2019, 18). It is possible that af Klint was illustrating the political, psychocultural process as well as the development of individual consciousness, by deconstructing and stylizing the two swans through a process of multiplication, dissolution, and reformulation.

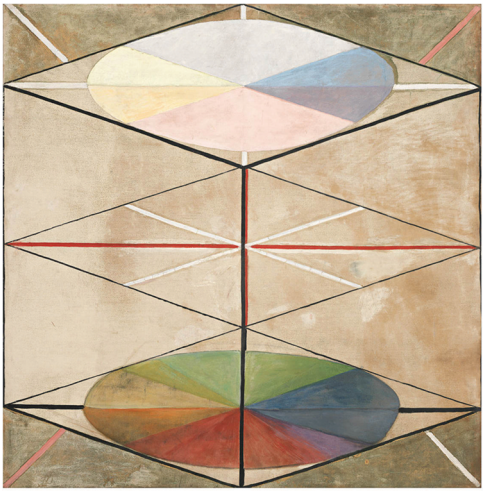
Some of the paintings in the series depict the swans as abstract forms filled with cubes with a dynamic movement of involution and emergence between the swans (see *The Swan,* No. 9, on page 158). The cubes have an uncanny resemblance to *fractals,* a term first coined in 1975. According to *Merriam-Webster,* the word *fractal,* from Latin "frāctus," means "broken" or "fractured" and conveys the concept of theoretical fractional dimensions to geometric patterns in nature. It is amazing to see contemporary fractal-like forms in this artwork from 1915 wherein af Klint is deconstructing the representational form. The movements of the geometric and organic forms evoke a sense of wonder in the transformative nature of "being" as they are pulled forward prospectively in a process that results in circles and, ultimately, in a complex geometric form that is "unrepresentational" in its conveyance of "becoming." In paintings *No. 22* and *No. 23* of the series (see images on page 160), af Klint introduces this "unrepresentational" form through the figure of the diagrammatic *polyhedron* (a three-dimensional shape that usually has flat polygonal faces, straight edges, and sharp vertexes (angles). The polyhedrons convey a sense of process as well as dynamic states of progression. Ryle suggested that af Klint's use of geometrical abstraction is a form of "coding in a diagrammatic way and transforming the symbolist image of the swan into abstracted political aesthetics of the diagram" (2019, 18). Af Klint's political message challenged the gender inequality of her time and reconfigured the polarized opposites inherent in androgyny.

The emergence of the diagrammatic geometrical figure also reflects af Klint's connection to the transpersonal and to enhanced states of being. This *form of code* expresses these nondual states in the process of human individuation. Through this geometric figure, af Klint conveys her vision for an individual's life trajectory as well as her hope for the future of culture. Ryle advocated that af Klint's vision countered the resurgence of Neo-Romanticism (2019, 10), which one-sidedly relegated the feminine to a type of male consort while devaluing women. Most certainly, af Klint had a grander vision for the dynamics of the polarizing dualities of feminine and masculine expressed through her gendered color coding and choice of symbols. She shows us a process that suggests an embodied union of dualities that might evoke a more balanced outcome for cultural utopianism evoked from individual experiences of states of consciousness.

We might also more deeply understand the emergence of the geometric figure in af Klint's art as an expression of the dual nature of a cultural complex active in af Klint's time (Singer and Kimbles 2013). Jung viewed visionary art as providing a compensatory function to the time in which it was produced (Rowland 2005), that is to the cultural milieu in which the artist



Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan No. 22, 1915,* Oil on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)



Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan No. 23, 1915,* Oil on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)

lived. If we can recognize what is expressed in art, we can be more aware of dynamics alive in the culture in which we live. af Klint's work engages with this dual compensatory function by purposely bringing her consciousness in relationship with unconscious dynamisms through mediumship. Being present to the dualistic energies, af Klint transformed and became conscious of the rhythm of polarization and union—what Jung called *coniunctio* attained through the transcendent function.

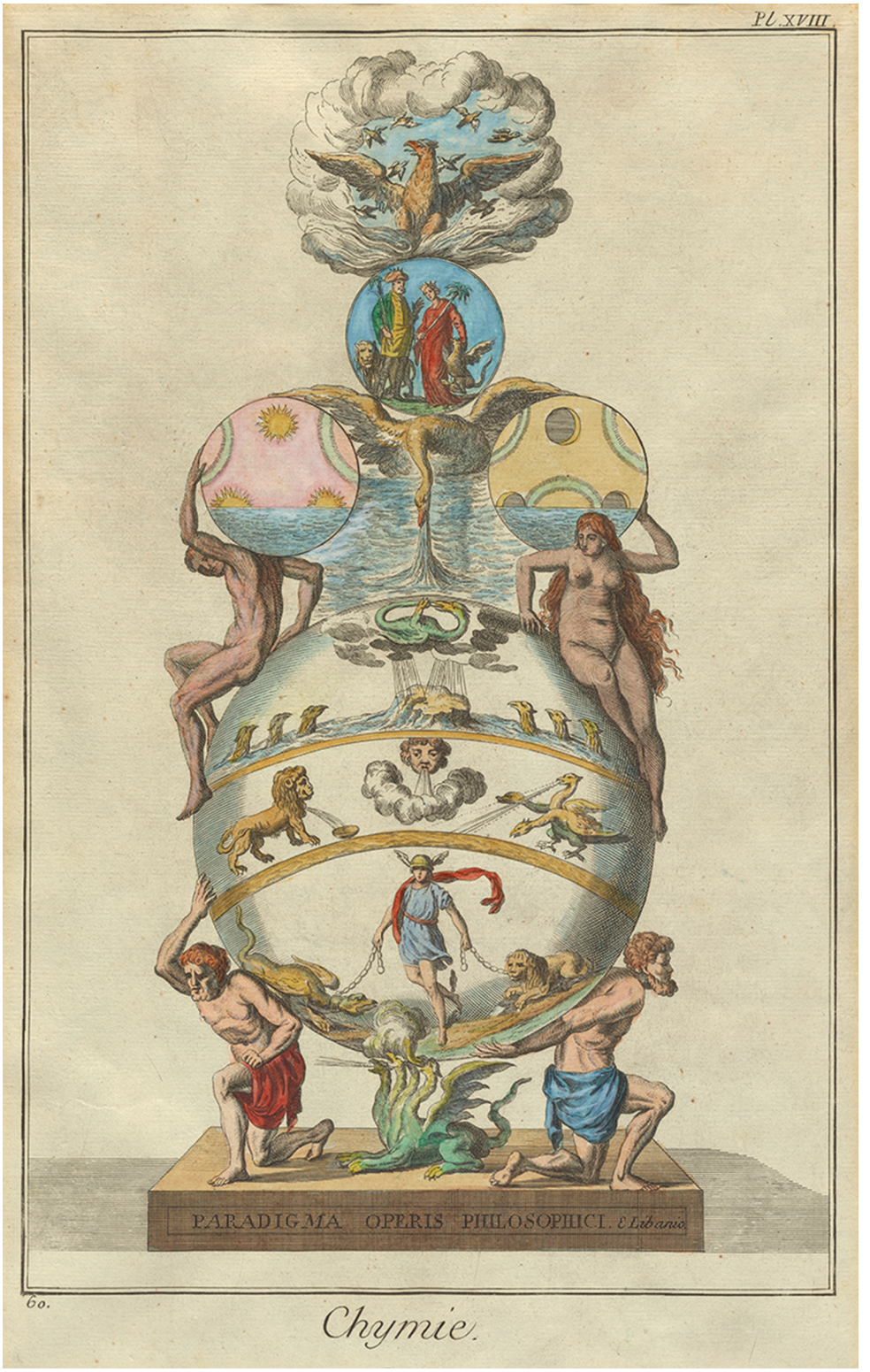
The final painting of the series, *No. 24* (see page 161), is once again of two representational swans intertwined with one another and with a diagrammatic jewel that hints at the previous image, the geometric polyhedron (*No. 23*), hanging from their necks as if internalized within them. This hearty image of the two swans represents a new experience of unity that resolves into an image of an integrated, embodied form. The two swans exude the roughness of the toll required by the process of transformation, evidenced in the style of the brush strokes and the saturation level of the paint. This painting illustrates the tumultuous process that must occur from polarization to disintegration to unification to form a conscious state that is a new state of being, yet embodies all that went on previously. The basic elements (the two polarized swans/masculine-feminine) have transformed. The embracing unity of the swans' bodies suggests the symbol of the cross (circle/Self) and the symbolization of the androgyne.

The transformation of contents and states through a prospective process in af Klint's *The Swan* series parallels the symbolism of the swan in alchemy, especially the sequence of stages in the alchemical process depicted by the alchemist Libavius, in his book *Alchymia* written in 1606, which Jung featured in "The Psychic Nature of Alchemical Work" (1937/1968, CW 12). In the figure (see page 162), the swan and white liquids are in the process of transformation and represent a mercurial force that can transform the black sea, represented in the image, through a process of fermentation. The alchemists posited that fermentation and



Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan No. 24, 1915*, Oil on canvas
(By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm)

transformation are mutually connected and evoke the creation of something new. Similarly, Schaeppi and Kaufmann detail an analysis of *The Swan* series with the key developmental points of the alchemical journey in *The Secret of the Golden Flower,* a Taoist text (2019, 32–33). In this way, the twenty-four images of *The Swan* series "can be considered a spiritual journey, or using Jung's words, part of an individuation process" (28). Af Klint's *The Swan* series as well as *The Ten Largest* series depict a psychological abstractedness that conveys the potential of human developmental transformation and evolving states of being.

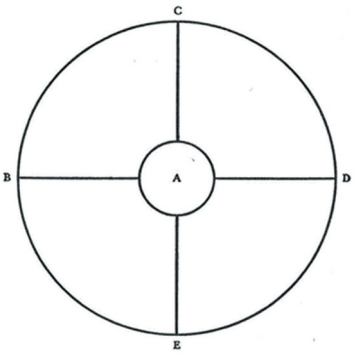


Alchymia. **Plate XVIII:** ***Chymie,*** **Volume III of Denis Diderot's** ***Recueil de planches, sur les sciences, les arts libéraux, et les arts méchaniques, avec leur explication*****. Diderot's allegorical image of chemistry has at its base the text "*PARADIGMA OPERIS PHILOSOPHICI, E. Libavio,*" in homage to Andreas Libavius.**

Jung considered individuation to be the main task of each human life and "the centralizing process in the unconscious that forms the personality" (1937/1968, CW 12, ¶561). Jung was adamant that assimilation of the unconscious contents by the ego creates beneficial psychic development expressed as various states of consciousness. The benefit stems from the withdrawal of projections from the dualistic opposite, which allows for greater expansion of the *quality* of an individual's consciousness. The developmental function of the unconscious may be oriented toward the creation of this relationship between the unconscious and the ego. However, it is the role of consciousness to have a relationship with the unconscious so that dualistic psychic energies transform through a coniunctio via the transcendent function. Even so, the ongoing source of polarized aspects creates a never-ending rhythm of polarity and union that engenders a prospective advancement toward wholeness. We see this rhythm and progression in the twenty-four images of *The Swan* series. Similarly, in painting *No. 10* of the *Ten Largest* (see image on page 157), it is easy to imagine that a sense of wholeness and an experience of a new psychological state of consciousness is depicted in the final geometrical form.

In addition to the shared use of geometrical forms and symbolic images to convey processes and states of being, Jung, like af Klint, experienced visions throughout his life. The embodied feeling of love that accompanied the visions that Jung described in *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* afforded Jung "an acceptance of [his] own nature" as well as knowledge of "the conditions of existence" (1965, 297). He described these experiences as states of objective cognition that yielded conscious knowledge. The spontaneous visions, other spontaneous phenomena, dreams, and fantasies were regarded as image carriers of feeling-toned complexes and possibly transpsychic contents as Jung later decided. They served a role in bringing the psychic and the transpsychic realm into a relation with his evolving ego-consciousness and engendered nonsubjective states. Jung repeatedly strove in various ways to convey these concepts and experiences. In one of his last books, *Aion* (1959, CW 9ii), he utilized specific geometrical forms to do so.

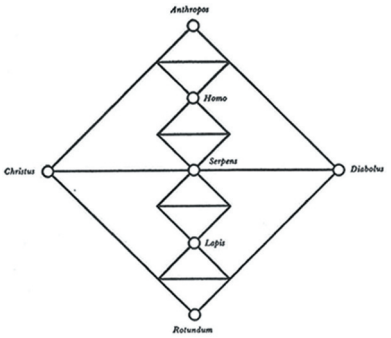
In the chapter "Structures and Dynamics of the Self" in *Aion,* Jung utilized geometrical diagrammatics to convey psychological process and states, including the concept of the Self. According to Murray Stein, Jung concluded that "if a spontaneously unfolding psychic process is followed to its own logical end and is permitted to express itself fully, the goal of this process will be fulfilled, namely, to manifest universal images of order and a unity" (1998/2010, 155–156). Jung viewed the Self as the "prime archetype from which all other archetypes and archetypal images ultimately derive" (156). As has been previously stated, an example of the expression of this prime archetype are mandalas—a universally spontaneous pattern of order represented as a geometric form (155)—usually a circle. The unity contained in the prime archetype is dynamic and is achieved when the entire psychic system becomes "more balanced, interrelated, and integrated" (159). Jung also used the geometric form of the polyhedron, specifically the *octahedron* (in this usage, a polyhedron with eight equilateral triangles, four of which meet at each vertex (angle), to convey the interrelatedness of various psychologically dynamic aspects that can evoke levels of consciousness. The octahedron is found in Plato's



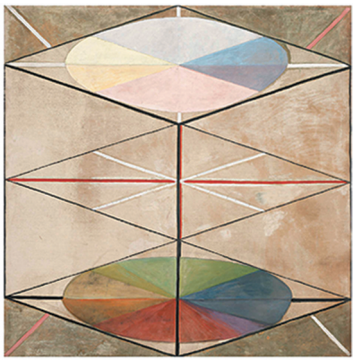
C. G Jung, Philosopher's pelican from *Aion,* page 240 (By permission of Princeton University Press.)



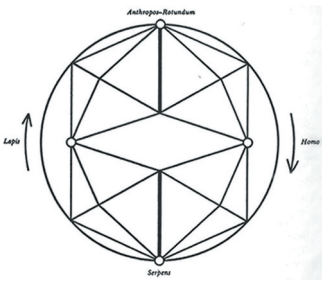
Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan No. 17,* 1915, Oil on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm.)



C. G. Jung, Octahedron from *Aion,* page 247 (By permission of Princeton University Press.)



Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan No. 23,* 1915, Oil on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm.)



C. G. Jung, Uroboros from *Aion,* page 248 (By permission of Princeton University Press.)



Hilma af Klint, *Group IX/SUW, The Swan No. 24,* 1915, Oil on canvas (By permission of The Hilma af Klint Foundation, Stockholm.)

writings to represent a space-time quaternion (L. Stein 2012). Leslie Stein explained, "The octahedron as the schema for the psyche's apprehension of the physical world and its representation also as the process for the development of consciousness makes it a perfect symbol for the equation" (31). Jung posited four octahedrons as representations of successive stages of consciousness (1959, CW 9ii, 231): (1) Anthropos Quaternity, which is both the initial and end state; (2) Shadow Quaternity, which is the instinctual state; (3) Paradise Quaternity, which represents the state of harmony, peace, and symmetry; and (4) Lapis Quaternity, the state of consciousness and wholeness (Stein 1998/2010, 163–167). Jung also illustrated how the octahedron is similar to a periscope-like cross within a circle, referred to as the philosopher's pelican in Western alchemy, which he stated is the same as a mandala and is representative of the Self (1959).

Thus, Jung described a progression of four key stages of consciousness attained through integration of various polarized psychic contents depicted through octahedrons. The quaternity of octahedrons represents the dynamic of becoming by illustrating their connection and rotation from one to the other. The four octahedrons then meld into one geometrical figure, an *icosahedron* (a polyhedron with twenty faces) (1959, CW 9ii, ¶¶390–391), which is uncannily similar to the geometrical figures painted by af Klint. In Jung's icosahedron diagrammatic figure, the complexity of the Self is inferred at yet another level of totality and wholeness through "three-dimensional six-pointed figures attached to each other end to end" (M. Stein 1998/2010, 163). Murray Stein explained, "the quaternities [squares angled as three-dimensional six-pointed figures] touch at the poles of their greatest opposition, at the extremes of spirit and matter . . . as dynamic circulation" (167). The four octahedrons fuse and become an icosahedron when flipped on its side, and diagrammatically illustrate the *uroboros,* another circular-shaped symbol suggesting wholeness or infinity. The octahedrons composing the icosahedron are linked through an equation that moves circularly in an interconnectedness of becoming (¶¶408–410):

> The formula presents a symbol of the Self, for the Self is not just a static quantity or constant form, but is also a dynamic process of restoration or rejuvenation taking place, as it were, inside the Self . . . . the psyche and matter exist in one and the same world, and each partakes of the other, otherwise any reciprocal action would be impossible. (¶¶411, 413)

For Jung, by attaining experiences of coniunctio and, concomitant with coniunctio, a state of "lucid consciousness" (M. Stein 2006, 5), a gateway is created. This opening engenders the possibility of an experience of even more multidimensional aspects of the psyche. Theoretically, encountering and integrating these polarized aspects will lead to further structural changes within the psyche through the process of an ever-changing consciousness. What is comparable in Jung's use of geometric form to represent these dynamic movements and states of consciousness are the diagrammatic geometric forms that af Klint utilized in her art. She, too, expressed conceptualizations of consciousness in her many series of artworks, as I've shown in the two series, *The Ten Largest* and *The Swan*.

What is noteworthy about af Klint's work is that she started painting these concepts and processes in 1907 (*The Ten Largest*) and again in 1915 (*The Swan*). Jung wrote *Aion* in the late 1940s. Af Klint's work is a unique contribution that deserves recognition. In addition, her life and art provide another context for understanding Jung in that the cultural milieu was evoking a connection

to these psychospiritual processes in those who tapped into the unconscious mysteries and were willing to be a conveyor of that information. Hilma af Klint and C. G. Jung dedicated their lives to exploring these psychic processes that move us prospectively forward through stages of consciousness. As analysts and analysands, we, too, are called to personally awaken to these dynamics to experience consciousness and experience integration. We can then help to constellate the dynamics with others who seek to experience integrated states of being and wholeness through integration of complex parts. Although I knew this to be so when I first went to the Guggenheim to see Hilma af Klint's works, it has been the pursuit of understanding her art that has guided me to delve more deeply into the profound writings of Jung with a lens that has instilled in me an even deeper understanding of the process of individuation.

NOTES

1. The title for this paper comes from a quote by Hilma af Klint in the film *Beyond the Visible: Hilma af Klint* (2019).
2. C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles and C. G. Jung Institute of San Francisco, "Call for Papers," email regarding a call for papers for the 2020 North-South Conference.

NOTE

References to *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* are cited in the text as CW, volume number, and paragraph number. *The Collected Works* are published in English by Routledge (UK) and Princeton University Press (USA).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

af Klint, Hilma. 1908. *Notebook HaK556*. Hilma af Klint Foundation, February 10. https://www.hilmaafklint.se.

Bashkoff, Tracey R. 2018. "Temples for Paintings." In *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future,* edited by Tracey R. Bashkoff, 17–31. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Beyond the Visible: Hilma af Klint. 2019. Directed by Hilina Dyrschka. Screenplay by Hilina Dyrschka. Zeitgeist Films.

Carter, Marybeth. 2019. "Painting Transcendence." *Jung Journal: Culture & Psyche* 13, no. 3: 170–178. DOI: 10.1080/19342039.2019.1636364.

Charet, F. X. 1993. *Spiritualism and the Foundations of C. G. Jung's Psychology*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Dias, Sarah Frances. 2017. "Hilma af Klint: Swedish Painter." The Art Story. Retrieved April 9, 2020, from https://m.theartstory.org/artist-af-klint-hilma.htm.

Fer, Briony. 2015. "Hilma af Klint, Diagrammer." In *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future,* edited by Tracey R. Bashkoff, 164–169. New York: The Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation.

Guggenheim Museum. 2018. *Hilma af Klint: Paintings for the Future*. Retrieved April 9, 2020, from https://www.guggenheim.org/arts-curriculum/topic/figuration.

Hillman, James. 1976. "Some Early Background to Jung's Ideas: Notes on C. G. Jung's Medium by Stephanie Zumstein-Preiswerk." *Spring:* 123–136.

Jung, C. G. 1902/1970. "On the Psychology of So-Called Occult Phenomena." *Psychiatric Studies*. CW 1.

———. 1905/1976. "On Spiritualistic Phenomena." *The Symbolic Life*. CW 18.

———. 1920/1969. "The Psychological Foundations of Belief in Spirits." *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*. CW 8.

———. 1936/1968. "The Symbolism of the Mandala." *Psychology and Alchemy*. CW 12.

———. 1937/1968. "The Psychic Nature of Alchemical Work." *Psychology and Alchemy*. CW 12.

———. 1959. "Structures and Dynamics of the Self." *Aion*. CW 9ii.

———. 1963. *Mysterium Coniunctionis*. CW 14.

———. 1965. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Edited and recorded by Aniela Jaffé. New York, NY: Vintage Books.

Kaufmann, Bettina, and Kathrin Schaeppi. 2019. "Illuminating Parallels in the Life and Art of Hilma af Klint and C. G. Jung." *Aras Connections*, no. 4. https://aras.org/newsletters/aras-connections-image-and-archetype-2019-issue-4

Main, Roderick. 1997. *Jung on Synchronicity and the Paranormal*. London: Routledge. Retrieved from The Centre For Psychoanalytic Studies, https://www.bibliotecapleyades.net/ciencia/ciencia_synchronicity05.htm.

Moore, R. Laurence. 1975. "The Spiritualist Medium: A Study of Female Professionalism in Victorian America." *American Quarterly* 27, no. 2: 200–221. DOI:10.2307/2712342.

Pelzer, Birgit. 2005. "Idealities." In *3 x Abstraction*, edited by Catherine De Zegher and Hendel Teicher, 63–84. New York: The Drawing Center.

Rowland, Susan. 2005. *Jung as a Writer*. East Sussex: Routledge.

Ryle, Jadranka. 2019. "Feminine Androgyny and Diagrammatic Abstraction: Science, Myth and Gender in Hilma af Klint's Paintings." In *The Idea of North: Myth-Making and Identities*, Vol. 2. *Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century,* edited by Frances Fowle and Marja Lahelma, 70–87. Helsinki: The Birch and Star.

Sharp, Daryl. 1991. *C. G. Jung Lexicon: A Primer of Terms and Concepts*. Toronto: Inner City Books. https://www.psychceu.com/Jung/sharplexicon.html.

Shreve, G. 2018. "When Women Channeled the Dead to be Heard." *JSTOR Daily*. https://daily.jstor.org/daily-author/grant-shreve/.

Singer, Thomas, and Samuel Kimbles. 2013. "The Cultural Complex." Introduction to *The Cultural Complex: Contemporary Jungian Perspectives on Psyche and Society*. London: Brunner-Routledge, 2004. Retrieved from The Jung Page: Reflections on Psychology, Culture and Life, https://www.cgjungpage.org/learn/articles/culture-and-psyche/629-the-cultural-complex.

Stein, Leslie. 2012. *Becoming Whole*. New York: Helios Press/Skyhorse Publishing.

Stein, Murray. 1998/2010. *Jung's Map of the Soul: An Introduction*. Chicago: Open Court.

———. 2006. *The Principle of Individuation: Toward the Development of Human Consciousness*. Wilmette, IL: Chiron.

MARYBETH CARTER, PhD, is a clinical psychologist and a candidate in the analyst training program at the C. G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles. She has a degree in religious studies from Indiana University and a doctorate in clinical psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute. She is an adjunct faculty at Pacifica Graduate Institute and Antioch University. She has a special interest in the creative arts and transcendent states. Marybeth has had an extensive career in nonprofit leadership and has published often in the victim and trauma services field. *Correspondence:* marybeth.carter@msn.com.

ABSTRACT

Marybeth Carter's paper, "Crystalizing the Universe in Geometrical Figures," draws on the creative works of artist Hilma af Klint and psychologist C. G. Jung to illustrate their use of geometrical figures as a form of code to denote states of consciousness integral to human development. Three key areas are explored common to af Klint and Jung: (1) mediumistic experiences popular during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; (2) the use of trance or imaginal states to access "invisible" worlds; and (3) the use of symbols and geometrical figures to express their insights regarding individual and cultural potentials.

KEY WORDS

active imagination, automatic drawing, consciousness, geometrical diagrammatics, individuation, C. G. Jung, Jungian psychology, Hilma af Klint, non-dual, the unconscious