

# INTRODUCTION



2.12 A picture is a model of reality. (L. Wittgenstein, *The Tractatus*, 8)

Identification rests upon organization into entities and kinds. The response to the question "Same or not the same?" must always be "Same what?" Different soundings may be the same such-and-such: what we point to or indicate, verbally or otherwise, may be different events but the same object, different towns but the same state, different members but the same club or different clubs but the same members, different innings but the same ball game... (Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking*, 8)

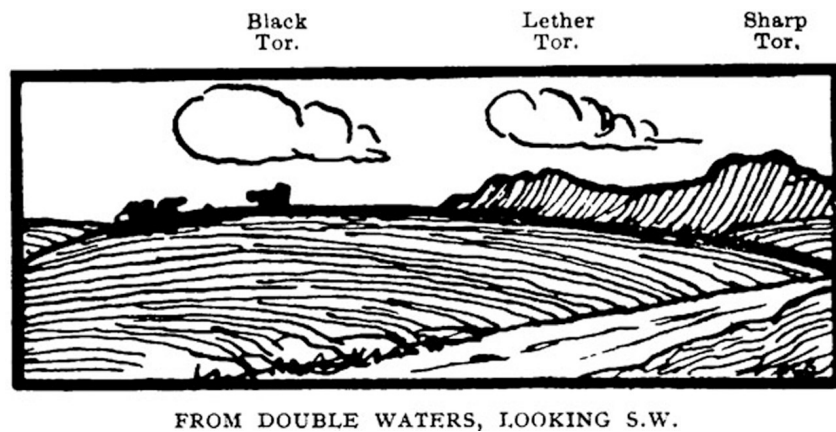
*In theory, there is no difference between theory and practice.  
In practice there is.* (attributed to Yogi Berra)

## **POWERFUL AND UNRELIABLE:**

24 IDEAS ABOUT PICTURES is made up of 24 visual/verbal propositions about the **grammar**, **meaning**, and **metaphysics** of pictures. Utilizing a step-by-step structure in which each lesson builds on those that precede it, 24 IDEAS considers what makes pictures--in collusion and competition with words--alternatively powerful and unreliable as representations of reality.

When Wittgenstein says that “**A picture is a model of reality**,” he is referring to its **grammar**: the quality and composition of its constituent parts. This does not mean that a picture is an ideal from which all understandings of a particular reality flow (although it can be used to represent that). What it does mean is that the way a picture is constructed--the formal arrangement of its elements, the common associations assigned to its content and form--is a depiction of reality in the same sense that a sentence made of words is.

Like a text, a picture is the product of a conventional language, incorporating accepted meanings and prescribed uses. Made up of lines, shapes, colors, tones, and iconography, pictures can be read in terms of the formal compositional choices made by those who produce them, but also understood in their relationship to other pictures. In this way, the expectations of visual interpretation and belief are woven into the process of looking and associating: part to part, example to example.



- 2.14      What constitutes a picture is that its elements are related to one another in a determinate way. (Wittgenstein, 9)

This illustration from *A Pocket Guide to the Hills and Tors of Dartmoor* by P.G. Stevens portrays a generic rural landscape. Drawn with pen and ink, it is conceptually reliant on our experience of the horizon line between earth and sky (the density of land, the weightlessness of clouds) but the captions tell us that we are looking at a specific array of hills from a particular direction. While not an abstract map that measures distance and scale, the captions provide a functional key to position and location. Despite its lack of fine detail, the drawing carries some sense of place, immediacy, and authenticity because it appears to be done on site.

Wittgenstein's proposition 2.14 refers to the determined arrangement of elements that constitute a picture (or a statement that presents the idea of a picture). We can claim that a picture is worth a thousand words because the picture and the words it evokes are--like a text and its translation--locked in a mutual embrace. One can't be understood apart from the other. Therefore, whether in support of beauty or fact, there is no essential truth to depiction, only the coherent alignment of words and pictures to the conventions of vision and interpretation.

Pictures represent specific goals and communication strategies that unfold in particular contexts. This is one of the implications of Nelson Goodman's statement about "entities and kinds." Once you identify the details of a picture, idea, or thing, distinctions about categories and comparisons with other things become paramount. That is, the meaning of a picture is a product of what it appears to be, what it is not, and finally what the artist or designer wants you to believe it is. In 24 IDEAS, most of the illustrations used are borrowed from resources not produced by the author, so the question of whose meaning is in play is always present.

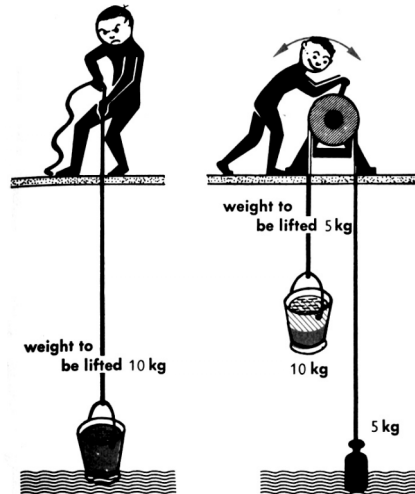
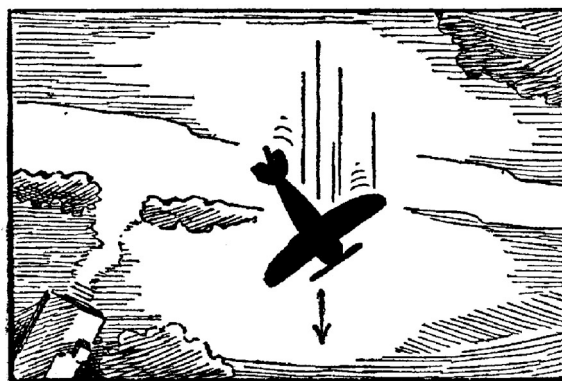


Fig. 1 PRINCIPLE OF WEIGHT AND COUNTERWEIGHT  
(THE WAY THINGS WORK, 239)

This diagram from *The Way Things Work* was designed to visualize principles of physics, not the weight and counter-weight of contingent arguments, but that is what it has been hijacked to do here. While a counter-argument may weaken or deny a point of view, it also takes some of the weight off the original assertion. On the other hand, we could see a counter-argument as a new perspective, a better example, or a variation on a theme that can deepen an understanding of "entities and kinds." In regard to 24 IDEAS, such distinctions require a picture to carry a heavy load, and credit should be given to the little man performing his task for the benefit of other pictures.

**Sometimes, in order to serve new goals, a picture has to fall from one intellectual height to rise up to another. This is the way things work.**

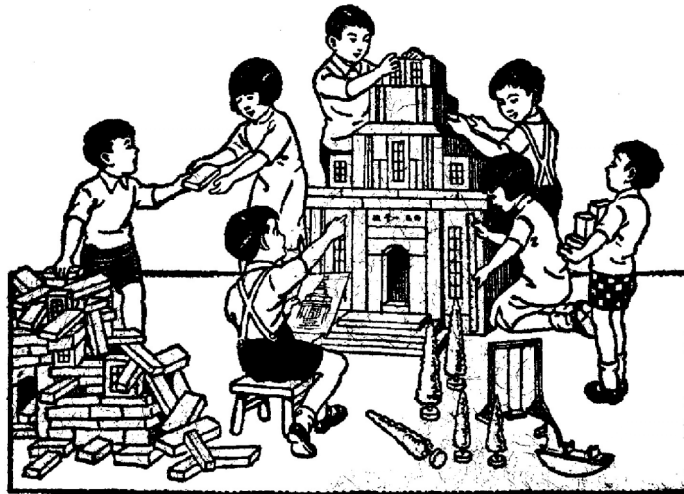


(Assen Jordanoff, *FLYING and HOW TO DO IT!*)

In 24 IDEAS, underlying all speculations about the reading and effects of pictures is a concern with the frames and conventions of **presentation**. When a picture is offered as an example of or commentary on reality, it takes its stand in a particular medium or form. It is a portrait, a sketch, a diagram, a cartoon, and so on. This list does not begin to describe the type and style of portrait or sketch, no less the circumstances in which it is framed and justified. Therefore, in theory and practice, the conventions that set the terms of the exchange wrap a presentation like a gift, which, even if it is welcome and expected, puts the recipient in a compromised position.



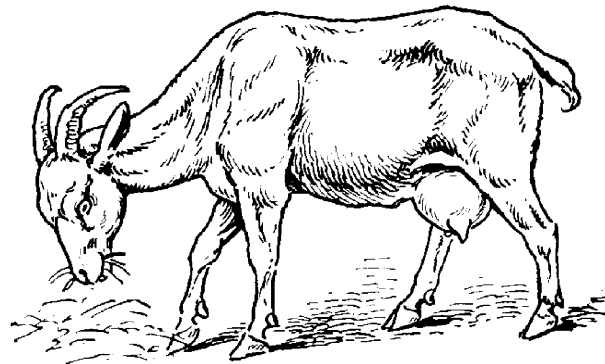
24 IDEAS is a book, and you could say that a book is both a gift and a highly respected model of reality. The authority of the book is a product of its long history as a communicative form, but what sustains this is the correspondence between its established conventions—page turning, numbered pagination, running heads, chapters, galleys of type, footnotes, endnotes, and indexes--and the strategies used in making its particular case. With 24 IDEAS, there will be a self-reflexive effort to cast light on how this book's terms are arrayed: that is, how does 24 IDEAS present itself?



For example, this illustration from a Taiwanese school primer is emblematic of childhood cooperation, industriousness, and commitment to a group goal: block building as a form of nascent play architecture that can be used to reach heights, contain space, create order, or enact destruction and renewal. Here the image represents an ideal for the book as a whole: block building as a metaphor for the studied creation of a *constructive*, yet necessarily fragile balancing of example and argument.



In 24 IDEAS, the cast of visual players is not only used to support assertions and characterizations, but to endorse an undercurrent of speculation and constructive doubt. Think of the circumstances of the playing card: two sides which alternately reveal and conceal in the service of many different agendas invested in an unlimited number of games. Further, while 24 IDEAS reads like a book, its graphic forms--both captioned and left to drift without attribution--colonize and traverse space like an artwork. Each graphic intervention has the additional effect of transforming the flat neutrality of the page into a potentially malleable geographical space: a narrative and visual play made possible by coercing the codex book to play straight man to pictorial illusion.



Throughout the book, characters like the smiley face, the billboard man, the spelunker in the cave and the footprint, function as graphic metaphors that reify ideas on the page. For example, the clip-art goat grazing above (and apparently behind) this paragraph will later serve to represent the Old Testament scapegoat, but is here proposed as a four-legged stand-in for the author engaged in satisfying and nutritious self-reflection: grazing in the fertile fields of knowledge and visual culture. It is also a reminder that reading is a digestive process. The goat is a ruminant with a compound stomach that requires several stages to process what it takes in. In this book, contemplative rumination is certainly favored over mindless consumption and elimination.

The goat is also used here to form a bridge to the issue of **metaphysics**:

**That is, after considering the goat's role in the text--how it yields both pragmatic and symbolic meaning--we might ask more broadly why we would trust pictures to stand in for us, to characterize our personal beliefs, hopes, and fears, no less to explain and justify the terms of cosmic order and significance.**

Like the goat, the iconic and symbolic heart also carries metaphysical inclinations. Whether indexing categories of generic love

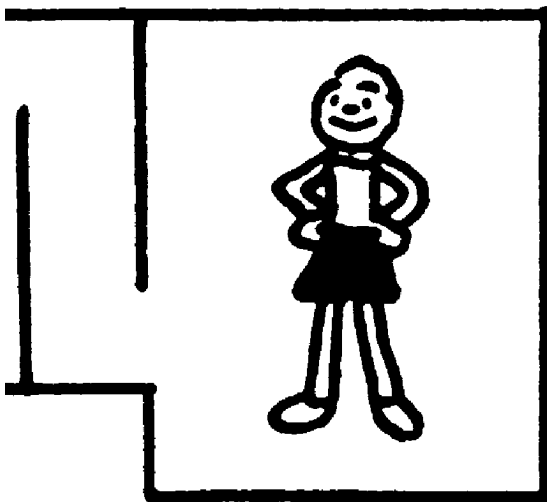
I ♥ NEW YORK    I ♥ MY HUMMER

or transcendental communication--as in Psalm 19: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer"--the heart represents the desire to make feelings manifest and transmittable in the world. The heart wants to be seen and heard, as well as felt. Trust me.



### **"WHEN YOU GET TO THE FORK, TAKE IT."**

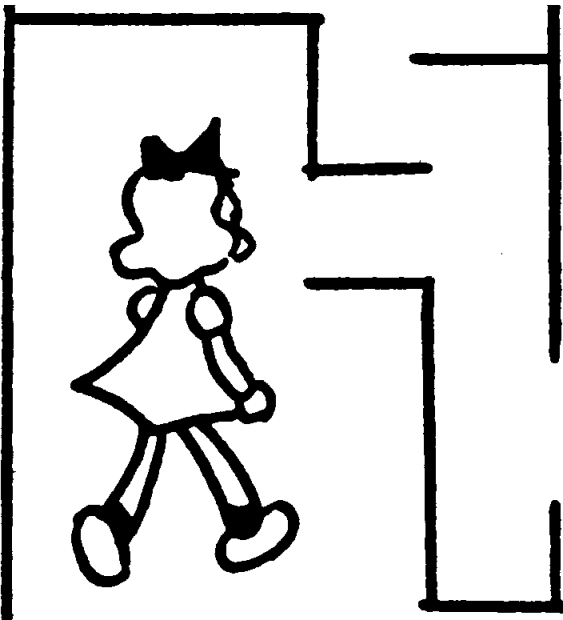
Metaphysical as well are the various zen-like statements attributed to New York Yankees' catcher Yogi Berra. His splitting the difference on the relationship between theory and practice is echoed in another assertion of studied ambivalence: "When you get to the fork, take it." While this was apparently a set of directions to Berra's New Jersey home, which could be approached from either leg of the fork in a road, it is also a model for investigating the varied contingencies that define pictures. Berra's acceptance of the often flexible boundaries of perception and language are also indelibly reliant on commonplace experience and usage. His authority is a product of respect for his mastery of baseball and the plain-spoken tone that makes him a modest and trustworthy philosopher without portfolio.



Over the course of 24 IDEAS, selected images and symbols are repeated: sometimes taken through simple permutations, at other times asked to call out to each other from distant locations in the text. Dickie, the figure pictured here, is poised to begin his own journey. An alert but wary refugee from a 1950s pencil and paper maze, he bears the spirit and style of his puzzle-book roots, but is required to straddle more than one conceptual dimension. Whether lost in a section of a maze, awaiting the author's instructions, or just taking a breather, Dickie is a cartoon character caught in a state of anticipation, subject to forces beyond his control.

Digitally scanned and sampled from a game pamphlet, he owes the apparent stability of his position on this page to an invisible formatted frame provided by the word processing program. With a half smile--is it wistfulness or veiled terror?--he looks out from this graphic sanctuary, but as a boy and as an illustration his position is transient. Dickie is *in* transition.

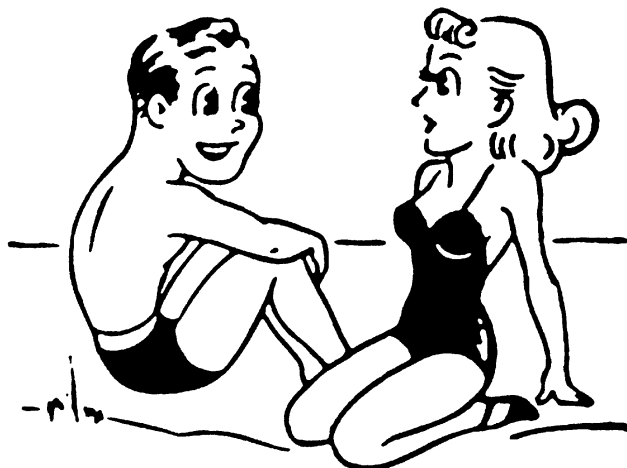
## THINKING ABOUT SOMETHING:



Doris, Dickie's compatriot in the maze, is presented here in the act of crossing through another of its compartments. Provoking uncertainty by turning her back on the reader, she could be entering or leaving or exploring the maze in no particular hurry. Since her face is hidden her intentions are unknowable. In the full maze (on view later on) she and Dickie serve as proxies for the reader's efforts to solve the puzzle, but for now she is just another designated actor in motion and the maze section is her fork in the road. This picture is a model of a fictional reality.

Meanwhile, nearby on a beach, sit a guy and a girl: Two images thinking about something--maybe each other.

Their proximity in the book to Doris and her section of maze doesn't put them inside the puzzle, but could suggest an alternative destination for Doris: The distinct weight and character of the lines that make up her form would not be an insurmountable obstacle if she had an appropriate bathing suit to put on. In any event, the guy and the girl on the beach look, like Doris, both defended and revealed. The guy clasps his



knees, and appears ready to speak or may already be speaking. The girl leans back on her hands, but seems somewhat tentative about the guy's intentions. As visual characters, the couple can be used to signify broad concepts like *beach*, *courtship*, *youth*, *leisure*, *Southern California*, *conversation*, and *intimacy*. In theory, despite their self-absorption, the couple is still available for interactions with unrelated graphic figures, but in practice, this may be no more than parallel play. Characters placed in the same visual orbit may never trespass into each other's abstract terrain, at least not without the support of dialogue, scene directions, or the imaginative projections of the reader.



This photo pictures another beach couple, my great aunt and uncle posed in the garden of their Miami Beach residence hotel circa 1975. In contrast to the guy and the girl, they face the viewer (and the camera) and there is nothing tentative in their body language or affect. This has something to do with their age and the acceptance of imperfect bodies that are not on display for others, or for each other. They have made a commitment that the guy and the girl may not have contemplated. As a couple, they can be seen as emblematic to the extent that they represent the satisfying leisure that retirement might bring, but they lack the style and enthusiasm to be ideal

contemporary models for the glories of luxury condominium living.

Roland Barthes in his book *Camera Lucida* examines the qualities in photographs that give them both a documentary weight and a metaphoric and psychic charge. He speaks of the sense in which the photograph takes a stance, adopts a pose, in the photographic moment of a portrait, event or scene. Barthes calls this quality “that has been”, a “superimposition” of “reality and of the past.” (77) In contrast, we are not likely to assign the presence of reality to the clip art beach couple, even if their graphic style references an earlier time. Still, they share a moment within a narrative space in time and it is possible to imagine that the photo documents the culmination of the beach couple's successful courtship and long-term marriage. Frozen for all eternity in their bathing suits and youth, the clip art couple—unlike my aunt and uncle--has nothing but time ahead of them.



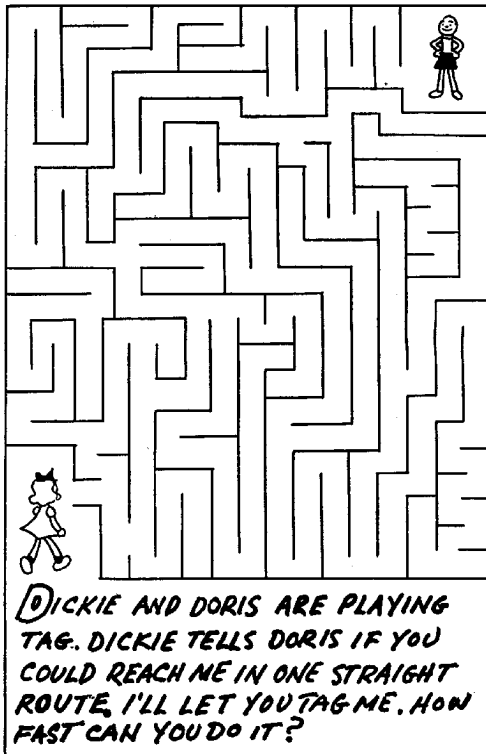


*"Dress a stick in finery, it will also have charm."*

Walking in the vicinity are a stick figure couple who seem to be both physically and emotionally attached. They appear deep in conversation. Even less likely than Doris to graphically fit in with the beach crowd, their forward motion gives them a claim on the white space to their left as measured by the distance from the book's gutter or edge of the page. Even the fertile tree in the background seems to bend to their presence. Has it been affected by a shift in the wind, or is it listening to what they say? If there is any ambivalence to the couple's relationship, it is centered on gender. Is this a boy/girl, boy/boy, or girl/girl couple? Locating them back in the era Doris, Dickie, and the beach kids inhabit, heterosexual infatuation would have been the norm portrayed. But looking at this image now, it is easy to see other options. Another anomaly is the baseball cap on the left-hand figure. Either it is being worn backwards and he or she is looking towards the other figure, or frontwards and he or she is looking straight ahead down the path. Also, the backwards cap mimes a version of hip hop or fraternity boy style that sends the vintage stick figure hurtling into the present.

Like the couple on the beach, the stick figure couple can be used to signify general concepts like *relationship*, *infatuation*, and *conversation*, but because they are in motion, they also incorporate the element of time. The stick couple begin their walk on one page, and when they reappear later we could reasonably assume that their conversation has progressed, much as this Introduction is proceeding towards some inevitable, yet still largely undefined, goal. As with many of the images used here, the stick couple endorses the premise proposed by the Yiddish proverb inserted underneath--"Dress a stick in finery, it will also have charm"--that visual embellishment can enhance the sensory pleasure of an idea, but will not necessarily make it credible. In this case, though, the caption requires some identification as well: Is it part of the stick couple's conversation or a dismissive comment by the omniscient author about their fragile body types, style, and demeanor? It is worth creating uncertainty if it puts the reader in a critical frame of mind.

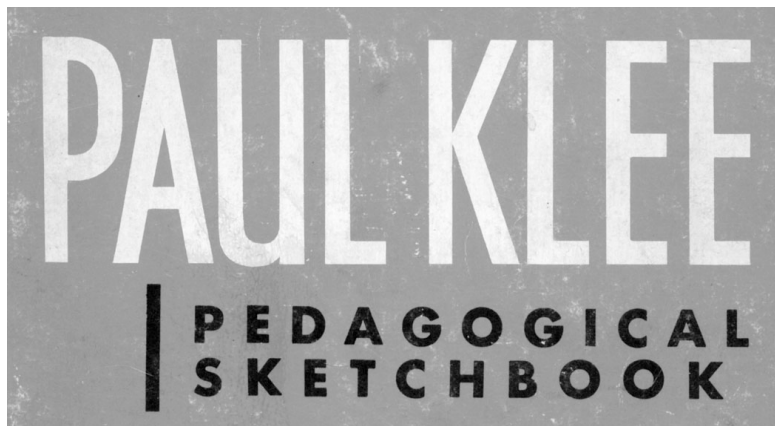
## ARE WE STILL ON THE SAME PAGE?



Through its "sensory fields" and its whole organization the body is, so to speak, predestined to model itself on the natural aspects of the world. But as an active body capable of gestures, of expression, and finally of language, it turns back on the world to signify it. (*The Primacy of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty, 7)

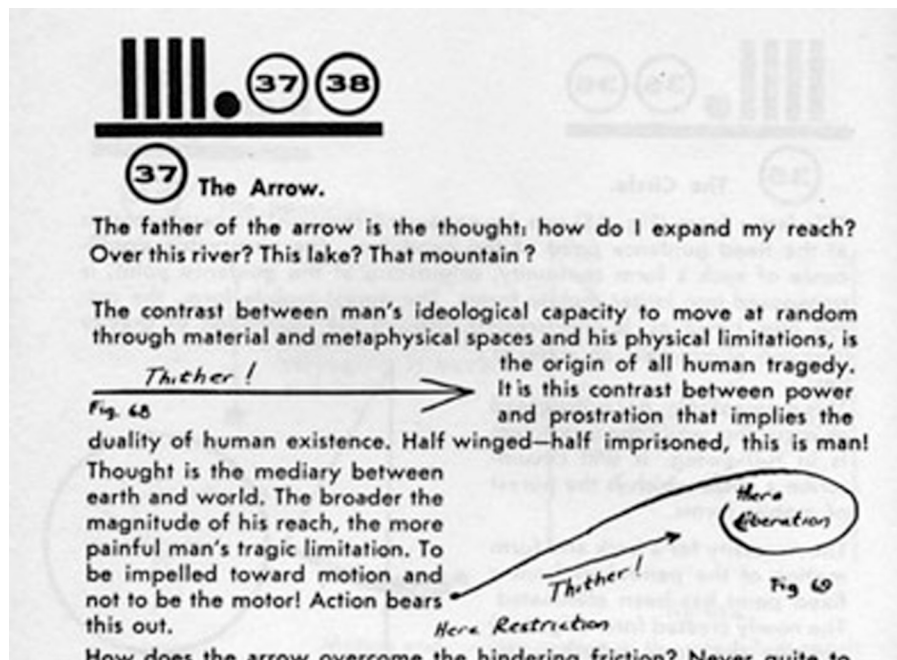
In this view of the full maze, Dickie waits and Doris pursues in a game of slow-motion tag. It has taken a few pages to see the roots of Dickie and Doris' graphic circumstances, but their reunion is a way to locate them in the collective inventory of the text. To draw the correct path, the puzzle player needs to focus on the pattern from above, not empathize with Dickie and Doris' personal needs and intentions. Still, that kind of identification may enhance the puzzle's kinesthetic effects. Playing tag is about

adjusting to risk and uncertainty, negotiating achievable goals while acknowledging the organizational flexibility of a dynamic space/time map.



An important antecedent for 24 IDEAS is Paul Klee's *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, a guide to his 1925 Bauhaus course on design theory. Built around a series of drawings and diagrams that illuminate his approach to the visualization of time, dimension, and space, Klee grounds his lessons in the study of lines, structures, systems, and dynamic forces in nature and science. Like the *Pedagogical Sketchbook*, 24 IDEAS is meant to both teach *and* advance an intellectual argument, making its

case systematically, establishing a rhythm and holding ground in ways that both reflect and assert its convictions.

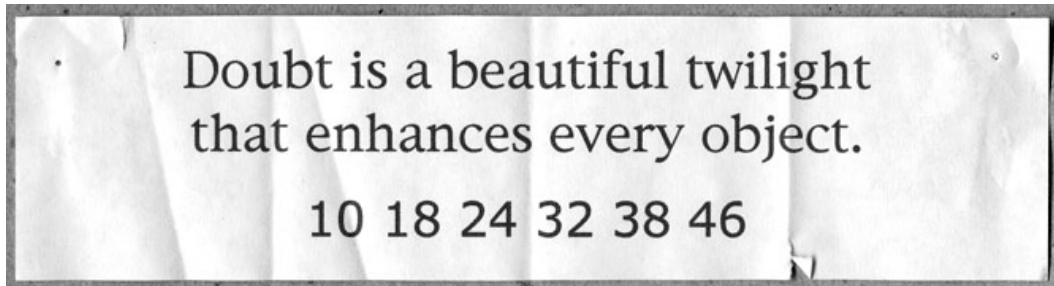


For Klee, the graphic arrow described in the above diagram is the symbolic expression of “reach,” or imaginative potential. It embodies thought and action but is leavened by a tragic limitation: the imperative to dream and create does not give humanity ultimate control over the cosmic “motor” of fate. While many examples in the *Pedagogical Sketchbook* are located in the workings of commonplace things (bones, muscles, hammers, wheels, scales, spinning tops) every description is defined by Klee’s iconography. So in a sense, he has created a system in which at least the motors of self-expression are very much in his control.



This is a picture of an arrow. A sign that literally performs **pointing** and **directing**, the arrow has attitude but does not coalesce into character or scene. It is both static *and* in motion: an iconic representation of a projectile in flight; an index that references location, direction, and varieties of contextual links; a

symbol that reflects the unbounded dimensions of time and space; and a metaphor for motion, intention, and speed. The arrow insists and suggests, and is open to guidance and manipulation. Graphic stand-ins for the pointing finger and the emphatic voice, arrows exemplify the orienting impulse of the sign.



**This is a digital scan of a fortune cookie message. While it is an artifact of reality, it is less a model of experience than a philosophical ideal to live by. If its numbers apply, it is also a ticket to winning the lottery. Doubt's twilight is "beautiful" because it marks a transition between states of transience and revelation, disappearance and appearance, nothing and something. Doubt is also beautiful because it joins projection and rumination to guide the book's path, pointing forward and backward in book time.**



It is this contrast between power and prostration that implies the duality of human experience.  
Half winged—half imprisoned, this is man!

(Paul Klee)

