

1 Tramer, Moritz, *Technisches Schaffen Geisteskranker*. Munich and Berlin, 1926. In this study, Tramer was concerned with the cognitive abilities of the patients: do the machines work, are they innovative, do they make a contribution to culture in general, can they be constructed? A second aim was to refute the premise of psychoanalysis that sexual curiosity is the driving force behind every form of behaviour directed towards discovery and investigation. Tramer later gained quite a reputation in the field of child and adolescent psychiatry, and turned his back on the area of inventions and artistic representation. In his work published in 1926, only two 'influence-exerting machines' are described: the drawings by Robert Gie and Tramer's case 5, Sch. J., who was in the Rosegg asylum at the same time as Robert Gie and felt himself tormented by a device that produced "pain films". The drawing of this piece of apparatus has been lost. Further information about Robert Gie can be found in: Jean Dubuffet, *Publications de la Compagnie de l'Art Brut*, Fasc. 3, 1965/1999; Marielène Weber, „Machines et Dessins de Machines dans l'Art Asilaire. Retour sur l'Imaginaire et le Dessin Mécanique", in: Fabienne Hulak, ed., *Pensée psychotique et création de systèmes. La machine mis à nu*, Ramonville Staint-Agne McGregor, *Deus ex Machina*, unpublished manuscript, 2005.

2 Moritz Tramer, *Rosegg. Kantonale Heil- und Pflegeanstalt Rosegg Solothurn und Kantonales Pflegeheim Fridau*, Zürich 1932.

3 Tramer 1932 [see footnote 2], p. 18 ff.

4 Tramer 1932 [see footnote 2], p. 11.

5 Tramer 1932 [see footnote 2], p. 33.

6 Tramer 1932 [as in footnote 2], p. 11.

7 The training of the nursing staff and the introduction of occupational therapy as well as places for the patients to walk about were important psychiatric reforms made in Switzerland in the period 1920–1930. They were introduced, for example, in Münsingen under Max Müller, in Waldau under Walter Morgenthaler, in Geneva under Charles Ladame and in Lausanne under Hans Steck. For this, see also: Bernhard Echte, *Nachwort zu Friedrich Glauser: Matto regiert*, Zürich 1998, pp. 273 and 276.

Robert Gie was born in Solothurn, Switzerland, in 1869 and was a carpenter by profession. He was sent to the mental hospital in Rosegg in 1908 and left this institution of his own volition in 1922. No further information is available about him after his departure from the asylum (see below).

The psychiatrist, Moritz Tramer, published a report about Gie based on the patient's medical history and oral information obtained from a houseman who had attended him; this report is to be found in his book devoted to "Technical Works by the Mentally Ill" (*Technische Schaffen Geisteskranker*)¹. In this work, Tramer was concerned with inventions: he investigated plans drawn up by eight male schizophrenic patients in Rosegg, questioned them about these plans and asked them to construct models based on them (which most of them refused to do). Tramer was not personally acquainted with five further cases mentioned in his study, one of these being Gie, as Tramer was first appointed head of the institution in Rosegg in 1924 (a post he held until 1945), about 2 years after Gie had discharged himself. While Gie was in Rosegg, the director was Tramer's predecessor, Greppin (1892–1924)². At this time, Charles Ladame was a houseman in the mental hospital in Rosegg (1918–1924); it is his collection that is the source of the drawings by Robert Gie and copies thereof that are known today (now in the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne).

Excursus: The Cantonal Mental Hospital in Rosegg (ill. 1)

The mental hospital in Rosegg was first opened in 1860, at which time it had 96 patients; by 1875, this number had risen to 203, with the First World War raising the number of inmates in 1916 to 439 in 260 beds. The institution was overcrowded, and the main hall and workshops had to be converted into dormitories. The patients were in the care of two doctors, this number only being raised to three in 1927³.

The asylum in Rosegg was a relatively small rural institute with no research department of its own. It was perceived as having a preventive role in the understanding of mental illness, as serving to "raise the standards of public care for the mad" and the "dispelling of prejudices against madness, insanity and mental hospitals"⁴. Important developments in the Rosegg asylum were the setting up of a place for patients to walk about, the opening of a nursing home for older patients, and the provision of psychiatric care for children and adolescents. From 1921 onwards, training for the male and female warders⁵ was gradually introduced; up to this time, such staff were expected to be on call at all times and to live in the institution, which made family life difficult for these warders and played a decisive role in the increased use of measures involving compulsory restraint in the treatment of patients. In the care of the patients, the main measure employed was occupational therapy: there were laundries, gardens where fruit and vegetables were cultivated, a carpenter's and fitter's workshop and a stationery store (ill. 2). Tasks performed in such places were a form of treatment, with the possible areas of activity being assigned flexibly, and an important criterion being that patients should be frequently given the chance to do something different. Hobby-like occupations, including artistic activities, were promoted and encouraged wherever possible. The institution in Rosegg was committed providing treatment with the minimum possible amount of repressive measures⁶; however, isolation cells were first abolished in 1932, this also being, as Tramer remarked, a consequence of the nursing staff having fewer responsibilities⁷.

Abb. | ill. 2

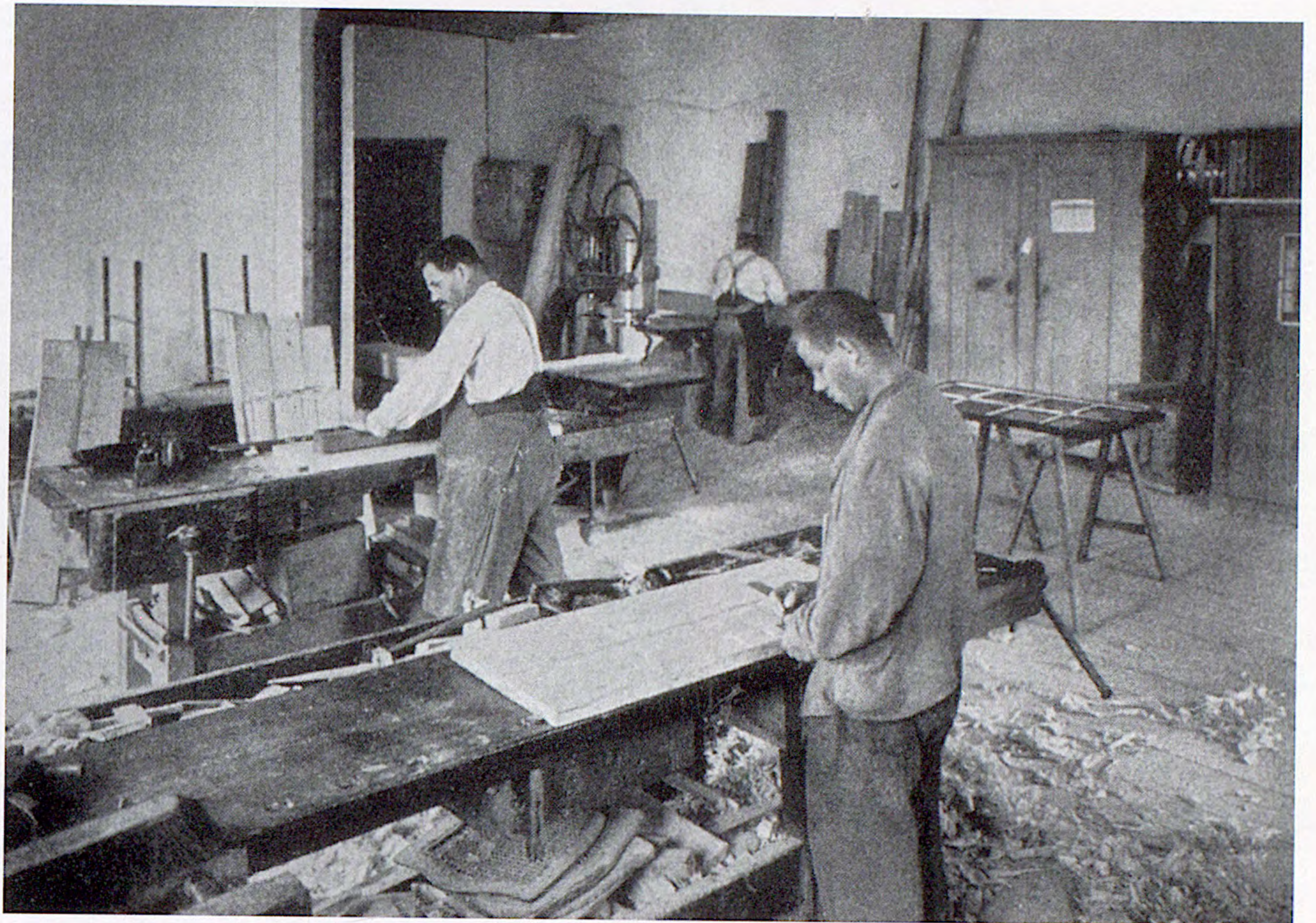
„Hauptschreinerei“

Main Carpentry Workshop

in: Moritz Tramer 1932

(wie Anm. | see footnote 2)

S. | p. 26, Abb. | ill. 20



Robert Gie in the Mental Hospital in Rosegg

As Tramer notes on the basis of entries in his medical records, Gie had always stood out “as a strange character”, self-willed and remote. He had phases when he worked well and others when he drank to excess. He married at the age of 38 years, but he “behaved oddly in the marriage, believed that his wife had other men and often ran away from home”⁸. Before being sent to the asylum, he was found wandering about, was picked up by the police and brought to Rosegg. Once there, he “sat there gaping a lot” or was irritable; “acceptance of the pathological nature of his condition was not to be seen”. Gie was diagnosed as having a dementia paranoides. During his stay in Rosegg, there was no further mention of his alcoholism. Thus, it may be supposed that Gie was less an alcoholic or binge drinker than someone who needed alcohol as a form of self-medication for the psychotic states that were beginning to trouble him.

Just a month after his admission, a doctor noted that he “is much more approachable than at the beginning, (he) claims that the walking of his fellow-patients constantly gives rise to a sick feeling in his feet and legs that rises up as far as the heart region”. In fact, Gie drew the feet of his figures as though they were extraordinarily sensitive, with the heels and balls of the feet looking like sensory organs. A few days later, the doctor noted that Gie now thought that his own steps gave him this sick feeling; in addition, he was now hearing voices coming out of his body talking about “war stuff”; he said that he had been hearing these voices for a long time before his admission.

Two years later, in 1909, a report tells us that “he lives in a completely different (world) than the real world”. In 1911, he became more calm. In 1916, it was noted that he liked drawing, while in August 1917, he was drawing “less now than before”.

His drawing activities continued periodically until 1922. At times, he wore a turban or a handkerchief like a veil over his face in order to protect his orifices from exterior influences ("so that no smoke could get to him"). In 1918, it was reported that "he sometimes draws horrible figures"; he hid his drawings from the doctor but sometimes gave them "to someone or other sharing the room", and he did paintings (perhaps) on the walls of his room⁹. In contrast to some of the other patients investigated by Tramer, he exhibited an ambivalent attitude towards his pictures¹⁰.

In 1921, Gie's agitation had decreased to such a degree that he was transferred to an external ward of the asylum, either in the nursing home in Fridau that was primarily used for elderly or independent patients unlikely to cause disturbance or in the 'free community' in Oberhof, where four patients lived with a warder and his family (ill. 3).

Whichever, he soon ran away and wandered about for several days, "– didn't find any work and, with swollen feet in a state of exhaustion", was brought back by the police. Nonetheless, he was allowed to leave 1 year later: he had become a "diligent, regular worker" no longer showing any signs of hallucinations or delusions. He had also stopped drawing. When, during work on his projected publication, Tramer tried to take up contact with this patient, he proved impossible to trace, and a letter to addressed to him was returned by the post unopened. The last mention of Gie is that he had been brought before the courts because of a misdemeanour, the nature of which Tramer failed to specify¹¹.

Tramer's Mode of Interpretation

Tramer did not consider Gie's drawings to be "horrible"¹², but he was nonetheless surprised and puzzled: he felt that he had never before seen anything remotely comparable to them (as inventions or as works of art?). He looked at the collections of Prinzhorn, Réjè and Pfeifer¹³, but was unable to find anything comparable, although he thought that "some of the three-dimensional works" held by Prinzhorn were similar¹⁴. In Gie's case, though, the drawings were "diagrams that were only intended to be such", "diagrams of the world-feeling of schizophrenics that approximates the magical (world) of primitive (peoples)"¹⁵. Tramer asked himself whether Gie visually reproduced his hallucinations or whether his pictures represented a metaphor for these. Tramer thought that, in Gie's language of forms, he could detect the work of a carpenter, whose figures look as though they might be made up of narrow strips of wood that have been nailed together¹⁶.

This aspect comprised one of the questions that Tramer intended to address: do a patient's professional skills remain undiminished during a psychosis, do they become extended, do they change or do they decline? Are they of any use during the process of rehabilitation? Do such patients manifest genuine flashes of intellectual brilliance or are these of a purely fantastic nature, i.e. can the devices they imagine actually be constructed, and might the inventions of schizophrenics be of any practical or cultural value? In Gie's case, Tramer was of the opinion that technical procedures and associations with bodily processes blended together into a "technical agglomerate" (an "indeterminate structure, in which heterogeneous parts are fused together")¹⁷.

As someone with a background in technical matters, Tramer constantly discovered agglomerates, flaws of logic, inconsistencies or incoherent features¹⁸

8 Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 199 ff.

9 Charles Ladame in: Jean Dubuffet 1965/1999 (see footnote 1), p. 36.

Flournoy, however, mentions an engraving carved into a door. See Henry Flournoy, „Le Symbolisme de la Clef“, in: Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse. VI. 1920, pp. 269–270. Moritz Tramer (Tramer 1926, see footnote 1) mentions neither engravings nor paintings on the wall.

10 It is not true to say that patients regarded their work with indifference. Adolf Wölfli took great care of his pictures, probably as a result of his recognition as an artist thanks to the efforts of Walter Morgenthaler on his behalf. However, Heinrich Anton Müller produced second versions of his pictures when they disappeared from the walls of the day room where he had hung them. Roman Kurzmeyer, ed., Heinrich Anton Müller 1869–1930, Katalog der Maschinen, Zeichnungen und Schriften 1994, p. 172. Another view is put forward by Lucienne Peiry in: Charles Ladame ou le Cabinet fou d'un Psychiatre, Lausanne 1991, p. 10, footnote 16. In this matter, the esteem according to the works by the staff or a doctor must certainly have played an important role in the patients' attitude.

11 Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 199.

12 Ibid., p. 200.

13 Richard Arwed Pfeifer, Der Geistesranke und sein Werk. Leipzig 1923. Marcel Réjè, L'Art chez les Fous, Paris 1907.

14 Hans Prinzhorn, Bildnerei der Geisteskranken, Berlin, 1922. It is possible that case 175 (Georg G.) is meant here, ill. 48. p. 95

15 Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 201.

16 Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 201

17 Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 207.

18 Ibid.

19 "What the violet cogwheel on the left of the drawing, which has one cog pushing against a protrusion of the thick wire and the band, means remains unclear to me (See also two such wheels in Fig. 53)". Moritz Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 205. The reference is to Figs. 52 and 53, pp. 202 and 203.

20 Ladame and Flournoy, who both took an interest in Gie's drawing were each (at least for a time) closely aligned with psychoanalysis. Ladame was certainly in the Rosegg institution in 1919 and probably stayed there until 1924. The dispute about this new method of treatment originating in Zürich and now spreading rapidly must have been very lively.

21 In the Waldau asylum in Berne, Walter Morgenthaler collected between 1913 and 1920 over 8,000 works by patients (see Mewinrad Lienert and Andreas Nydegger, Walter Morgenthaler und das bildnerische Schaffen Geisteskranker. Dissertation, Berne 1995); Moritz Tramer mentions hundreds of diagrams and drafts of his inventor-patients (Tramer 1926, see footnote 1); in Céry (Lausanne) from 1920 to 1960, Hans Steck collected works by patients, of which those, among others, by Aloise and Jules Doudin became well-known; in Heidelberg, Hans Prinzhorn collected 5,000 works from various European countries between 1919 and 1921.

22 Marielène Weber 2003 (see footnote 1), p. 97 ff. This text by Marielène Weber is the most detailed study of Robert Gie to date. The legal question of the ownership of those works produced in mental institutions was first investigated in 1995 by: Laurent Schweizer, *De la Production et de l'exploitation des oeuvres des beaux-arts du patient soigné en établissement psychiatrique*. Dissertation, Zürich 1995. Ladame took "his collection" with him and gave away a lot of it when he noticed that his successor in Geneva had no interest in this area. There is no catalogue of Ladame's collection. The fact that Ladame acquired for himself works by patients was nothing unusual at the time, although it would not be true to say that the question of the ownership and custody of such works had not been raised. Thus, Hans Steck and Walter Morgenthaler did not themselves own any patient's works, but rather passed them on to

in the diagrams produced by the 13 schizophrenics that he examined. Whenever such a diagram did not exhibit obvious technical shortcomings, Tramer's patients turned down his offer to let them construct a working model to check the viability of their invention. His technical and psychiatric training lends an interest to Tramer's way of looking at things: unusually, he devoted great care to investigating the functional capabilities of these plans, machines and inventions¹⁹. It is remarkable how little it bothered him that parts of the body, e.g. the oral cavity, were perceived as functioning like mechanical components; instead, he was perplexed by the fact that this comprised a "technical agglomerate".

In contrast, Robert Gie – and this explains why he covered his mouth and nose with a handkerchief – was perplexed that, in terms of his experience of it, the "agglomerate" worked so smoothly and efficiently that he was losing all control over it.

As a psychiatrist, Tramer resisted what he felt to be an oversimplified and hurtful manner of interpretation prevalent in psychoanalysis, i.e. to see in every type of interest or curiosity, a genital interest, and in every depiction, voyeurism²⁰.

I would suggest that, what Tramer referred to as an "agglomerate", is to be understood as a metaphor for the incoherence of experience and, thus, in a manner that never ceases to surprise, as a self-reflective element. The very seriousness inherent in a diagram seeking to explain an incoherent experience lends an aesthetic quality to these sheets. Tramer was not concerned with considering these works in terms of their aesthetic value.

Ladame's Mode of Interpretation

Charles Ladame (1871–1949), who was president of the Swiss Society of Psychiatrists, was closely associated, at least for a time, with the field of psychoanalysis and, like Walter Morgenthaler, Hans Steck and Hans Prinzhorn²¹, was a psychiatrist who, for various reasons, collected the creative works of mentally ill patients. From 1918 to 1925, he worked as a doctor in the Rosegg asylum and in St. Gallen²². In 1925, he became the head of the Bel-Air Clinic in Geneva. He brought a number of drawings and copies of drawings by Gie with him to Geneva²³. In Bel-Air, he set up a museum for his collection in 1928, but had to give up his post for health reasons in 1938, after which he began giving away parts of his collection to visitors, with the result that the collection effectively ceased to exist. In 1948, the few remnants were acquired by the Compagnie de l'Art Brut. Descriptions were provided concerning five of the 'cases' represented, these being short reports written by Ladame on the request of his friend, Dubuffet.

The text about Gie diverges little from the patient's medical history, although the discrepancies are not insignificant. Ladame writes that, in 1916, Gie "began to draw passionately on little scraps of paper that he manages to lay his hands on or on the walls of the asylum"²⁴. In his account written more than 18 years after his encounter with Gie, Ladame's character sketch portrays him as a stock figure of the romantic artist, penniless but driven on by a passionate attachment to his art.

In 1919, while in Solothurn, Ladame wrote an article about the literary genius, Guy de Maupassant, and his mental illness, in which he argued against the views of Lombroso²⁵. Ladame must have been fascinated by the question of the relationship between art and madness, as he collected works by patients

the clinic. For this, see: Lucienne Peiry, *Hans Steck ou le parti pris de la folie*, Collection de l'Art Brut, Lausanne 1991, p. 7.

23 There is no known list of the works that Ladame took with him from Solothurn.

24 "Dès 1916 s'adonne avec ardeur au dessin sur les bouts de papier qu'il réussit à se procurer ou alors sur les murs du préau de son pavillon" – Charles Ladame in: Jean Dubuffet 1965 (see footnote 9) p. 65.

25 Charles Ladame, *Guy de Maupassant, Etude psychologique pathologique*. Lausanne 1919, as a lecture held in Geneva University on March 7th, 1919. In this, he criticised Lombroso: "Cet aliéniste [...] étant trop imprégné de mysticisme, n'a su voir dans le génie qu'une efflorescence de la folie" (p. 8). "En dépit de l'opinion accréditée, la folie fait oeuvre de mort, elle stérilise et tue le génie" (p. 46). Ladame's argumentation employed the medical apparatus of psychoanalysis, not the "layman's analysis, as it is practiced by priests and teachers in Zürich", because "the two-edged sword of sexuality" is not something for unskilled hands" (p. 22).

26 "Il vient à l'esprit de rapprocher ces câbles transmetteurs des hallucinations corporelles mentionnées dans l'observation ci-dessus." Charles Ladame in Jean Dubuffet, 1965 (see footnote 9), p. 66.

27 Flournoy refers to this in Moritz Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 201. See also Flournoy 1920 (see footnote 9), p. 269.

28 Flournoy 1920 (see footnote 3), p. 270, footnote 1: "courant électrique insufflé à travers la tête au moyen d'un cor" and "deux hommes dînent à la même table et se disputent". I assume that Gie, as someone born in Solothurn, could speak German. In this respect, see ill. 10. McGregor is of the opinion that Flournoy interviewed Gie; however, it is possible that Greppin merely allowed him access to this patient's medical records. McGregor 2005 (as in footnote 1). Flournoy 1920 (see footnote 3), p. 270, records the measurements of all drawings as 20 x 16.5 cm and that all had a marked edging frame.

29 "Dans un cas comme l'autre il y a une "confusion" entre deux choses distinctes, due à un point commun: l'analogie de forme ou de fonction.

throughout his professional life. In his brief commentary on Gie's drawings, he nonetheless interpreted them as a mere illustration of Gie's symptoms, whereas Dubuffet used them as a basis for a retelling²⁶. In both points of view, one misses the aspect of bafflement that makes being confronted with the works of mentally ill patients so enthralling and which accepts that many questions have to be left open.

Flournoy's Confusion

The work of Robert Gie also attracted the attention of a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst working in Geneva: in 1920, Henri Flournoy published an article in the *International Journal for Psychoanalysis* with the title, *Symbolisme de la clef*, which included a drawing by Gie²⁷. He owed his access to Gie's medical history and drawings to the co-operation of the head of the institution in Rosegg, Greppin. Flournoy reported the existence of two brief texts on drawings by Gie that are to be numbered to the few – and therefore valuable – authentic pieces of documentary evidence written in Gie's own hand. They comprise the following statements: "electrical current that is fed through the head by means of a horn" and "two men are eating at the same table and arguing" The second title, in my opinion, applies to ill. 10, a small pen-and-ink drawing now to be found in Lausanne (see below)²⁸.

Flournoy's interest was directed towards Gie's somewhat peculiar way of depicting the male sexual organ. He declared that Gie had developed a system in which the genital orifice played an important role in the channelling of currents (e.g. electrical current), with these openings varying in shape according to the nationality of the person in question: thus, such orifices were rectangular in Frenchmen but round in Englishmen. However, this opening was usually kept closed, thereby making it impossible to distinguish one from the other. Flournoy was puzzled that Gie had apparently failed to notice that the genitals of his male figures resemble a key. Flournoy was an analyst with enough of a sense of humour to draw the idea of 'puzzlement' into his discussion, seeing it as an expression of that "confusion" between function and form which underlies every symbol as such: "In the one case just as in the other, there arises a confusion between two different things with a common place of origin: the analogy between form and function. As to whether this analogy that comprises the basis of every symbol arises in the mind of our madman or in our own (mind) is not important: whatever the case, it is a psychological fact"²⁹.

The drawing used as an illustration by Flournoy (ill. 4) closely resembles Figure 54 in Tramer's book. Both have a frame-like border, with the central section of the upper part of the frame having the form of a chimney or pipe extending beyond the frame. Both drawings depict two male figures, each of which is leaning slightly with the inner or outer part of one foot on a semi-circular form, while the other foot is not touching the ground. ill. 4 shows what would appear to be a dramatic interaction: a large figure with his head turned in profile and with his oral cavity and brain shown as inner cavities is gesticulating in the direction of a smaller figure standing opposite, who is looking with an expression of alarm or anger, as can be seen from the fine wrinkles on his forehead and his slanted eyebrows. "Gesticulating" may be the wrong word, though, and the coding of the facial expression is so severe and sparse in execution that it is reminiscent of the small robot-like Lego figures that are popular toys today.

Because Flournoy directs the interest of the viewer towards the rather wooden depiction of the genitals, one notices that these point in different directions in this picture. Throughout Gie's work as a whole, though, these are predominantly shown facing to the right, so that only in ill. 10 is the penis of both figures facing to the left. The above-mentioned opening at the end of the penis can be seen in one of the two pencil drawings now to be found in the Collection de l'Art Brut in Lausanne³⁰, which evidently shows an Englishman, although one has not the slightest idea what significance this might have. Flournoy's hypothesis does not give us an insight into the meaning of Gie's drawing, but instead, makes it even more strange to us. Nevertheless, with his drawings, Gie, a carpenter from Solothurn, succeeded in involving three psychiatrists, Tramer, Ladame and Flournoy – and perhaps Greppin, too – in a discourse concerning modern art, psychoanalysis and sexuality, in which (discursive) sexuality has the role of pushing the theoretical considerations in different directions in each case. At this time, i.e. c.1920, this was a highly relevant and socially important discourse whose protagonists were quite prepared and willing to make use of the outpourings of the mentally ill.

In this sense, Flournoy was justified in pointing out the fruitfulness of confusion.

The Drawings

In the Collection de l'Art Brut, there are 13 sheets assigned to Robert Gie, of which 2 are definitely original drawings by him³¹. A third one (ill. 10) is, in my opinion, also an original, although the catalogue describes it as being a tracing of a drawing made on a wall. However, this work is small (16 x 16 cm) and very finely and precisely executed on drawing paper using pen and ink, so that the assumption that it is a tracing seems highly unlikely. The remaining sheets are copies or tracings of drawings by Gie. Apart from these drawings now kept in Lausanne, there are, to the best of my knowledge, no other surviving works by Gie. The publications by Tramer and Flournoy contain illustrations showing four drawings that have since vanished, so that a total of seven sheets containing original works by Gie or accurate reproductions based on an original are now known to us (of these, five are reproduced here: ill. 4–6, 8 and 10).

Tramer reproduced three drawings, and two of these motifs are now in the Collection de l'Art Brut each in two copies on tracing paper (ill. 7). These copies may be the work of Gie himself, but they are much less precise than the originals as reproduced by Tramer.

Unfortunately, Tramer does not mention how many sheets by Gie were still in Rosegg in 1924, nor does he say how many of these Ladame, who he does not mention by name, took with him. In his work published in 1926 about "Technical Works by the Mentally Ill"³², Tramer only reproduced six works by patients; of these, only those by Gie occupy a full page, which would seem to suggest that Gie had acquired a fleeting eminence in the Rosegg institution³³. In the following, descriptions of illustrations 5–10 will be used to make a further approach to understanding the models Gie devised to explain his puzzling experience and perception of the world around him.

On ill. 5³⁴, we see three full-length figures who are standing and whose heads are shown turned to the right in profile. The figures on the left and in the centre have their hands raised, while the one on the right has his arms bent with

Que cette analogie, qui est la base de tout symbole, se soit produite dans l'esprit de notre fous ou dans le nôtre, peu importe; elle n'en existe pas moins comme fait psychologique".

Flournoy 1920 [see footnote 3], p. 270.

³⁰ Inventory no. cab A421, reproduced in Jean Dubuffet 1965/1999 [see footnote 9], p. 65.

³¹ Inventory nos. cab A421, cab A422 and cab A417, reproduced in Jean Dubuffet 1965/1999 [see footnote 9], pp. 65, 67, 69.

³² Tramer 1926 [see footnote 1].

³³ Unfortunately, all of the works described by Tramer have to be considered lost.

³⁴ Fig. 52 in Moritz Tramer [Tramer 1926 see footnote 1, p. 202], orig. 49 x 74 cm, drawn on wrapping paper, and Fig. 5 in Jean Dubuffet 1965/1999 [see footnote 9] p. 68, dimensions 49 x 67 cm, "Trois personnages parcourus d'effluves. Dessin à mine de plomb et à l'encre de chine sur papier calque, vers 1916" (p. 181). There is no evidence concerning the title and the date. Inventory no. cab A423.

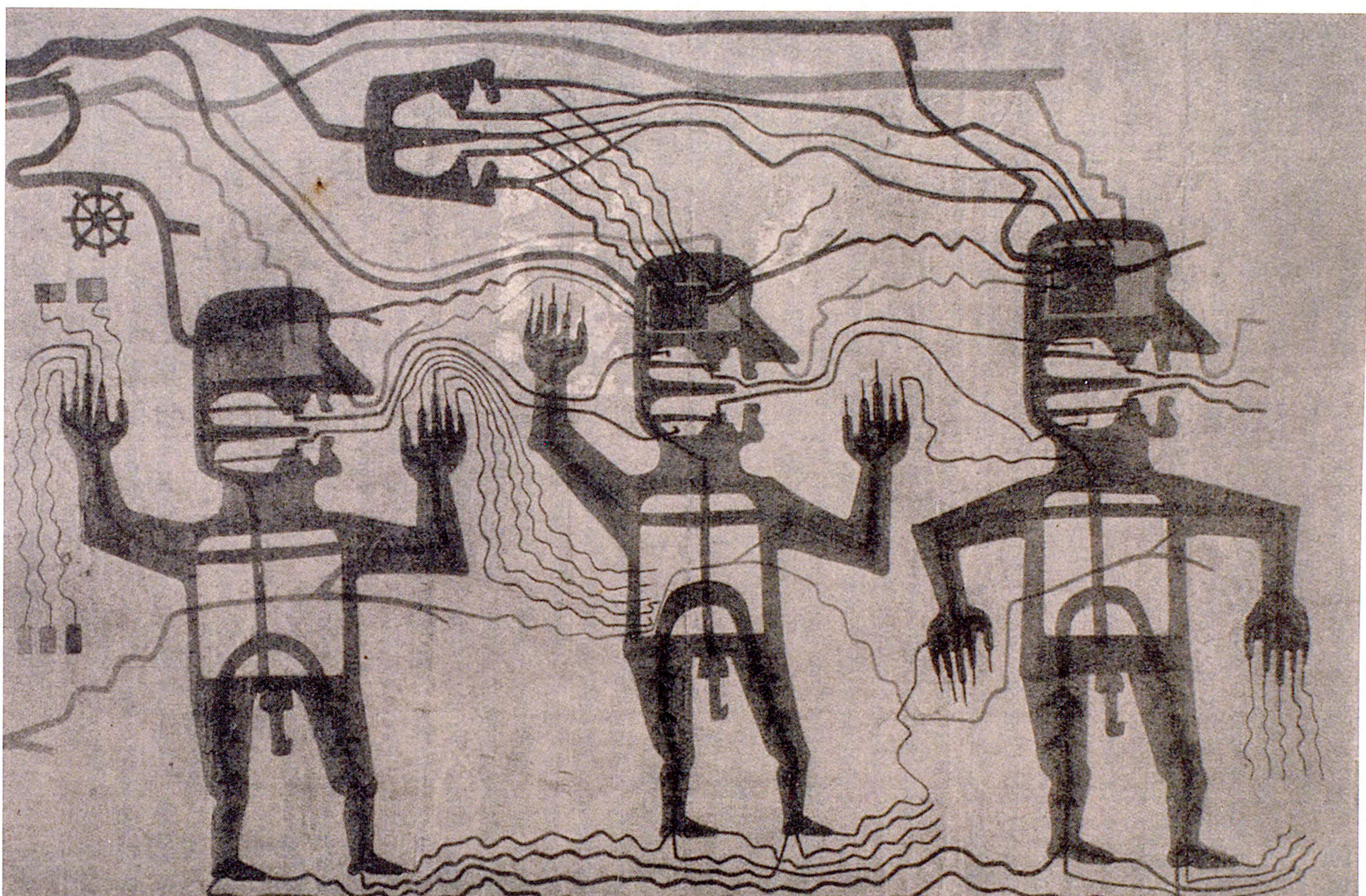


Abb. | ill. 5
 Robert Gie
 Ohne Titel | untitled
 undatiert | undated
**Bleistiftzeichnung mit violetterm
 Farbstift auf Packpapier**
**pencil drawing with a purple
 crayon on wrapping paper**
 49 x 74 cm
 in: Moritz Tramer 1926
 (wie Anm. | see footnote 1)
 S. | p. 202, Fig. 52.

his opened hands facing downwards. The drawing reproduced in ill. 5 has a broader format than the two copies on tracing paper showing the same subject which are now in the Collection de l'Art Brut; in the work reproduced here, the three figures are depicted in their entirety, whereas the ones in Lausanne are missing a section both on the left and right edges, while it would appear that a few centimetres are missing at the bottom, too. The information given by Tramer about the type of paper used (wrapping paper) would seem to rule out the possibility of these being tracings of the pictures drawn on the wall that have already been mentioned.

The tonal values within the figures are restrained and evenly applied, no individual lines are visible, and the contours of the forms are not raised in comparison to the surfaces they surround. The bottoms, knees, heels and elbows of the figures are drawn with great attention to detail; out of their fingertips and clearly delineated from these, little rods are sticking out, and sometimes cables or pipes appear to emerge from these. In the heads of the figures, there are control switches built into a hollow cavity. The cables or pipes run parallel to one another, their execution being remarkably restrained and particularly careful when their course is curved. The distance between these is so precisely drawn that every 'negative' form within surrounding contours can easily be seen as a positive shape, just like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

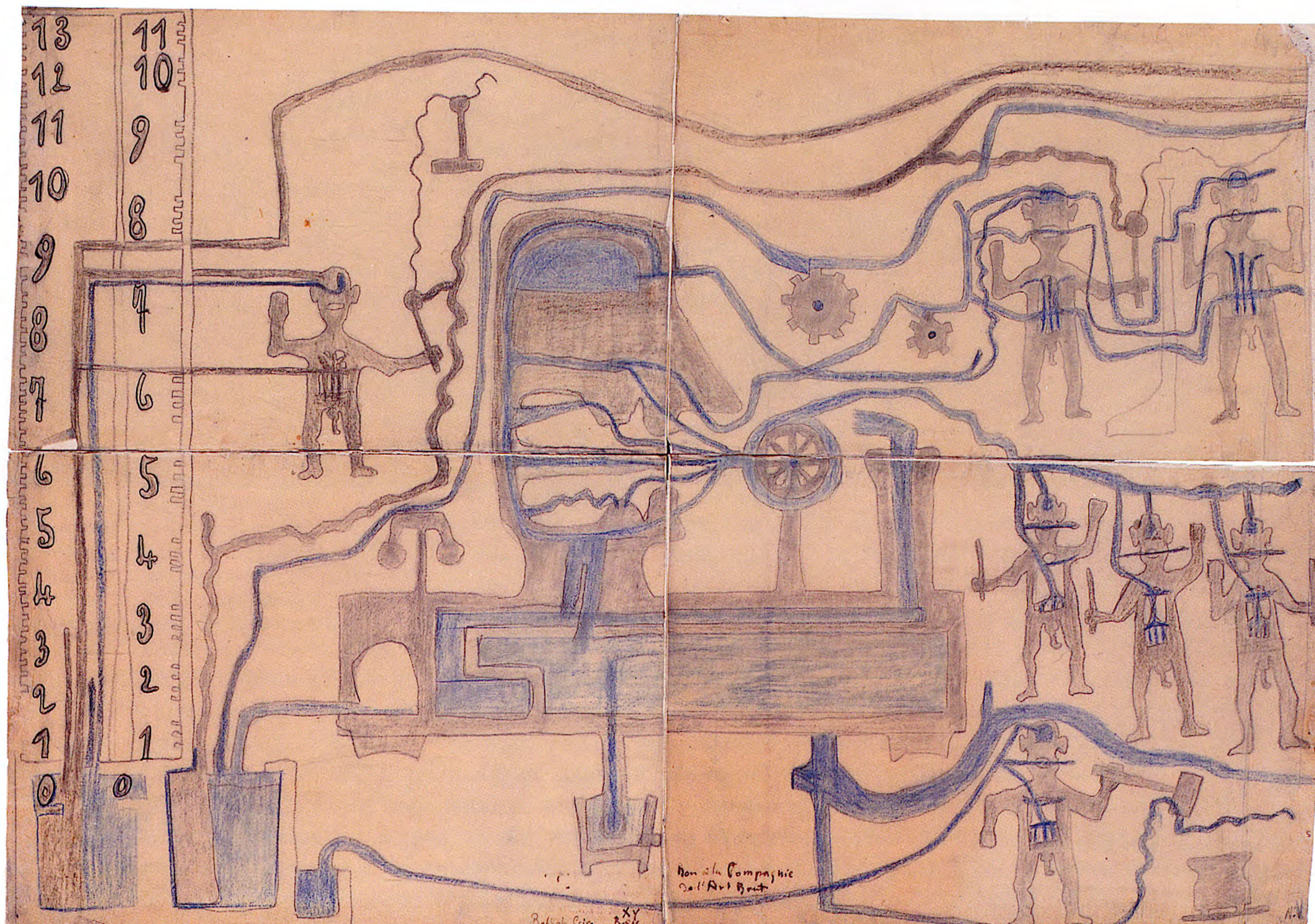


Abb. | ill. 7
 Robert Gie (Kopie nach ?)
 Robert Gie (Copy after ?)
**“Distribution d’effluves
 avec machine centrale et
 tableau métrique”**
 undatiert | undated
 Lausanne, Collection
 de l’Art Brut.

35 Moritz Tramer (see footnote 1, p. 207) saw an association between the “mouth organ” and the transmission of speech; McGregor (see footnote 28) sees a link with acoustic hallucinations, those “voices” that Gie “heard” within his head.

The figures have large heads turned in profile, while the oral cavities and chambers of the brain are clearly discernible. The oral cavity is differentiated into tongue, palate and palate plate, teeth and lips; however, this cavity does not lead into the body. From the little rods on the fingertips of the figure on the left, wavy cables or tubes extend either to the right into the stomach of the figure in the middle or, from the left hand, into thin electrical plates. From the little finger of the figure in the middle, a cable or tube leads to the neck of the figure on the right, whose left hand has one leading to the foot of the middle figure. A central isolated “mouth organ”, an object with the form of an oral cavity leads into the cerebral cavity of the figure in the middle³⁵. On the far left, there is a cogwheel whose function is unclear³⁶. Tramer also observed that two cables or tubes leading into the oral cavity are striking the palate plate and oral plate (two beams inserted in the oral cavity) with small hammers. The cables or pipes are touching sensitive sites of the body: in the head, on the soles of the feet, the tips of the fingers and the palate. Contact with these sites triggers reflexes that are involuntary and uncontrollable. In this context, one has to ask what effect an event like the First World

36 See footnote 19, Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 209.

37 The institution was already overcrowded in 1912: 320 patients had to make do with 260 beds, the number of inmates rising to 375 in 1914 and 439 in 1916. In this last year, the number of admissions reached a peak of 153, this including a large number of soldiers. Two annexes were added in 1913 and 1915 [see Moritz Tramer 1932, see footnote 2, p. 19 ff.].

38 Figure 53 in Moritz Tramer, [Tramer 1926, see footnote 1, p. 203]. The information given is: "orig. 50/70 cm, dr(awn). on wrapping paper". Two tracings of this are in Lausanne; see Jean Dubuffet 1965/1999 (see footnote 9) Fig. 3, p. 66: "Distribution d'effluves avec machine centrale et tableau métrique". "Dessin à mine de plomb, aux crayons bleu et sépia avec quelques rehauts à l'encre sur papier calque, 48 x 69 cm, vers 1916". There is no evidence concerning the title and the date. Inventory nos. cab A419 and cab 8570; here Pl. 7.

39 "In the case of the scales on the far left, one thinks of a water-level indicator and a manometer. The figures don't fit for a thermometer". See Tramer, 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 207, footnote 1.

40 There is no copy in Lausanne of the third sheet reproduced by Tramer: Fig. 54 in Moritz Tramer (see footnote 1), p. 205, with the description, "orig. 17/22 cm", but with no information concerning the materials or media used.

41 Jean Dubuffet 1965/1999 (see footnote 9) p. 67, Fig. 4, "Système cosmique de circulation d'effluves", 31 x 89 cm, grey cardboard, c. 1916. Inventory no. cab A422. Four pieces of card of vertical format laid next to one another. Pencil on thin card exhibiting severe yellowing. The drawing continues right down to the bottom, to the top and left edges, while, on the right, the last c. 10 cm towards the edge is empty.

42 The history of the representation of robots in about 1900 should be added.

War may have had on a man like Gie – an extremely sensitive man, for whom the steps of others in the same room brought distress penetrating "right into the heart" – who began drawing in 1916; certainly the Rosegg mental hospital was not unaffected by the war, inasmuch as a battalion of soldiers took up quarters there on two occasions, planned subvention for the institution was dropped and the number of admissions rose sharply. Conditions must have been terribly cramped and noisy³⁷.

The drawing ill. 6³⁸, reproduced in Tramer's book was executed on wrapping paper. The work has two noticeable tonal values, which Tramer refers to as violet tints. In the tracing in Lausanne, the format reveals that the image has been slightly trimmed on all four sides (ill. 7). In this case, the contours are much clearer in the reproductions, the tonal values on the original being applied so evenly that they might have been printed, this being quite amazing in a drawing executed by hand

The work is dominated by the central figure, whose head is in profile and attached to a substructure with a hollow interior and chimney, which Tramer referred to as a locomotive. Cables or pipes extend out of the mouth, nose and brain to five of the smaller figures. The three containers or reservoirs in the bottom left-hand corner are compact on the original, the scales showing numbers ranging from 1 to 13³⁹. In Tramer's reproduction, the small figure on the left is standing above a floor slab which is missing in the Lausanne version. This figure is directly attached to the scales and therefore assumes a special position, possibly the role of a foreman; the small figure on the lower right is directly fed or steered by pipes extending from the third reservoir into its head, mouth and trunk. This figure is wielding a hammer, there is an anvil next to it, and it is privileged in having more room for movement. In the space within the "locomotive", the pipes on the tracing have been inaccurately copied, with the result that their meaning and function has been distorted as compared to what can be seen on the original. Five of the smaller figures with pipes leading into their head, mouth and body, who are holding sticks or other tools in their hands, have a war-like, military look about them. Owing to their tonal values that are darker than those of the pipes, they seem more suggestive, more masterful in Tramer's reproduction than in the copy in Lausanne. The small figures are not linked with one another, being steered or controlled directly from the containers or from the central head⁴⁰. The picture would appear to be making reference to a hieratic system involving work or service.

The pencil drawing on ill. 8⁴¹ is definitely an original and comprises four 31-cm-high yellowed pieces of card that have been carefully joined together. A part of the second piece of card is missing, and Gie drew pipes circumscribing the gap. The picture contains seven figures, the one on the far left is a bust or robot with a face shown looking forwards that is placed on a rectangular torso. Although geometrised, this face is executed with great delicacy and sensitivity, having perfectly circular eyes with round pupils and an oval mouth. It is reminiscent of a robot, like those that appear in modern science-fiction films (e.g. "C3PO" in *Star Wars*, Episode 4, 2005; ill. 9), evidently classic, timeless features and, in this sense, reliable⁴².

Above the bust, there is an isolated entity with a hollow interior corresponding to the oral cavity in the head seen in ill. 5. All of the pipes emanate from

this pictorial element and the bust: these apparently feed or control the first two figures as well as, via four elements positioned behind one another on the lower and upper edges of the picture, the four figures in the right half of the image, whose pipe supply is further regulated by a large pincer-like device. Therefore, the picture shows, one might say, a generator and two circuits, with the two figures on the left possibly having, because they are broader, a hierarchic status over those on the right; furthermore, the connections between these two and the two controlling organs are exceptionally complicated and close. It is possible that the right-hand section of the picture was added later.

Gie's sensation of being interpenetrated or influenced was recorded in his medical history: the footsteps of both his fellow-patients and himself forced their way inside him, he was "bothered by smoke", and "from the water's source, the current flows through the wires to those who bother me". A system that "bothers" is presented here; it is explained in mechanical terms. Those that cause the bother are, in turn, connected up with "water" or with "current". They work (with hammer and anvil) or they "get war stuff ready"⁴³.

The central steering organ is not so much the brain as the oral cavity, a feature which Tramer thought might be associated with speech⁴⁴. This site of the body, just like the soles of the feet, is also a highly sensitive instrument for acquiring information about one's surroundings (as babies use it), it is the place from which, in addition to the voice and speech, breath and water may flow out of. (In children, and frequently in handicapped and autistic children, breathing – in the form of breathing on – has a magical significance.) At an intellectual level, Gie penetrated and grasped the occurrence of his being influenced as a mechanical and hierarchic happening. He gave this a clear order, took the emotional charge out of it and gave it a solid form. The technical and physical use of metaphor was in keeping with his time⁴⁵. Gie succeeded in achieving a certain control over his being under control. One may suppose that this gave him pleasure, which is why the picture is drawn pleasingly, carefully and with a great expenditure of effort; it is noticeable that the quality of attractiveness impresses itself more easily on the viewer in the case of the original, whereas the reproduction predominantly evokes a feeling of disquiet provoked by the fantasies of being controlled, resulting in the complete loss of control and autonomy.

The small pen-and-ink drawing on ill. 10 is carefully executed on drawing paper that has faded to a brownish-yellow colour. It depicts two men whose left arms are raised; between them, there is a bowl and two spoons. A fine network of lines connects the two figures. The geometrisation is severe, the hands are gigantic and shovel-like. Each man only touches the ground with the sole of one foot on a slight hump. The man on the left is taller, fatter and has a beard, while the forehead of the smaller figure is wrinkled with worry or anger. It is notable how economically yet vividly Gie presents his subjects. "Two men are eating at the same table and arguing" may be the title, as passed on by Flournoy, that Gie gave to this small piece⁴⁶. This cannot be proven, yet it does seem plausible. If this assumption is correct, the picture shown in ill. 10 would be the only drawing whose title is known to us. It provides us with a surprising insight into Gie's world of experience: surprising, because it depicts an everyday, albeit dramatic, scene, an argument at the dinner-table, a piece of daily life in the asylum⁴⁷. Gie's portrayal of the scene is forceful and highly disconcerting, yet the manner of representation is severely formalised.

43 Moritz Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 206.

44 See footnote 35.

45 Hydraulic models were also used by Freud to explain psychic processes. Tramer mentions the use of electricity as a method of treatment back in 1876 [Tramer 1932, see footnote 2, p. 11]. It is unclear to me which method he is referring to. The electro-encephalogram was first invented in 1927 by Hans Berger, with electro-convulsive therapies first being used in 1930.

In 1916, when Gie began to draw, his intellectual system serving to explain his disconcerting sensations had, in all probability, already been carefully thought through. He became less agitated and, by 1921, had “become [a] diligent, constant, regular worker”⁴⁸. Even if he was still, in part “living in a completely different (world) than the real world”, this experience had faded to the point that he longer mentioned it and had stopped drawing it.

Influence and Sovereignty

Little is known about Robert Gie: we have only three original works by him and a few extracts from his medical records. He drew with great sensitivity – the oral cavities, hollows of the knees, foot soles and fingertips of his figures are, as it were, drawn as though he had physically touched them, the spaces between the figures are so precisely delineated as though they are meant to represent a medium for conducting the flow of electricity or water or for offering resistance to these. In contrast to this sensibility of portrayal, there are those figures through which current or water appears to be flowing and which are being fed or influenced, robots whose meaning and expression are difficult to interpret. Their mechanisation expresses a highly alienating and disconcerting world of feeling. Flournoy referred to this as “confusion”, while Tramer called it a “technical agglomerate”. Although most of them are lost or have only been handed down in the form of tracings, Gie’s drawings, with their use of metaphors that have a timeless relevance, constantly bring us back to the question of the relationship between sovereignty and influence.

In a certain sense, Gie’s position here is like that of an object, situated between four psychiatrists like a woman, at least at the time he was alive: he was undressed, examined, questioned. One asked oneself what he was thinking, what he noticed, whether or how the mechanical features of his inventions functioned. He was a key in the hand of psychiatrists – to use Flournoy’s metaphorical image – for gaining a better understanding of a current question. This question did not concern Gie himself as a person (the man who was easier to deal with when he had a handkerchief), but rather, it served the professional and social interests and purposes of each particular interpreter (in Tramer’s case, technology; for Flournoy, symbolism; for Ladame, art). It was difficult for Gie to appear as a creative author: his works easily tempt one to use him for one’s own purposes. Even today, this particular form of reception is a characteristic feature of the way art from psychiatric institutions is dealt with. For women interned in such places – and for this reason, it is justifiable to mention roles assigned to the different sexes – it was even more difficult to gain acceptance as an creative author⁴⁹. The consternation and, at the same time, the hierarchic circumstances – Gie had been declared legally incapable; he was only capable of having some, if any, influence in or via his imagination – may have contributed to this specific form of instrumentalisation coming to the fore. In this, it is necessary, albeit without simplifying matters to an inappropriate degree, to bear in mind the underlying intention of acknowledgment and appreciation.

46 See footnote 28.

47 In the everyday life of asylums, mealtimes were occasions fraught with conflict, these arising as a result of envy, greed, hunger or conversations leading to arguments. See Walter Morgenthaler 1921/1985 (see footnote 10) p. 139, Eintrag in die Krankengeschichte Wölfli vom 5. 7. 1919. Heinrich Anton Müller smashed his machine to pieces “because, according to his account, he had been given too little bread”. Roman Kurzmeyer 1994 (see footnote 10), p. 171, Eintrag in die Krankengeschichte Müllers vom 14. 11. 1914.

48 Tramer 1926 (see footnote 1), p. 201.

49 Impressive examples relating to this subject can be found in: Bettina Brand-Claussen and Viola Michely (Eds.). *Irre ist weiblich. Künstlerische Interventionen von Frauen in der Psychiatrie um 1900*. Exhibition catalogue of the Prinzhorn Collection, Heidelberg 2004.

Abb. | ill. 10
Robert Gie
(Kopie nach ? | Copy after)
Ohne Titel | untitled
undatiert | undated
Lausanne, Collection
de l'Art Brut

