Knowledge Production at the Borderline Territory: Phenomenology of a Transformative Encounter

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Learning is a life-long process of growth and transformation through personal experience. Learning, like creation, takes place in relation. Life happens in the interval of matter. In the magnetic field of an active void— the space-time interval of change — a new form of life is created. Intention is to explore the incentive for knowledge production dynamics in the education of architects through a lens of relational phenomena. The key stimulus for production of knowledge is a transformative encounter with the dissimilar 'Other'. The process of learning architecture is examined through the phenomenology of perception as the epistemologically most suitable apparatus. Experience of the inside-outside relation in spatial perception of architecture is compared with the one in psychoanalytical dynamics. Winnicott's seminal concept of 'transitional space' is juxtaposed with a dynamic experience of transgressing porous architectural boundaries — both being analogs of the learning process.

INTRODUCTION: THE WORLD AND I

In a culture of interconnectedness and change, architectural education is a complex experimental process. School–laboratory is an organized transient community of self-reflective individuals engaged within an active discovery-oriented atmosphere. Pedagogical approach is a nonhierarchical dialogue, individualized and emancipatory. Method can foster collaboration and/or induce instability; it sustains conflict, failure, and crisis. Reflective practice stimulates personality development in the process of individuation and actualization of potentials. Transformative encounter is an open process, an exchangeable relationship.

In the world of constant transformation, identity is constructed *in relation*, and not in isolation. The pedagogical aim is to provide stimulus for a radical interaction between daring subjects responding contemporaneously, instead of habitually (Ellsworth, 2005). In the process, architects-in-becoming must transcend their confining personal and social contexts. A transformative encounter of self with the world brings a change of standpoint — a paradigmatic shift. Learning-unlearning is a vital oscillating dynamic, a breakthrough of personal borders, entering-exiting, like inhaling-exhaling.

There is no doubt that my early background has incited a passionate personal interest for this subject particularly. After my brother and I were born, our family moved from Zagreb to a tourist town at the northern Adriatic coast. At the time, the nearby city of Rijeka was the largest shipping port of former Yugoslavia, and my father worked there as ship doctor. When we were still young children, our family used to take ocean trips on transatlantic merchant ships, and some intercontinental journeys lasted for couple of months. Moreover, we lived so close to the Italian border that it was normal to drive back and forth on a daily basis, even if just for a stroll in Trieste. Tourists that visited our town came from countries larger than ours, so we started learning their languages even before going to school.

Ours was a region of great national diversity and social dynamics, in constant flux. Diversity is the essence of education. Cultural differences I encountered and absorbed as a child enhanced my social awareness of 'the other', the capacity for comprehending and learning from that other. I feel a strong affinity to Édouard Glissant's idea of a universal heterogeneous unity or 'worldmentality' (Glissant, 1997), of permeable borders between nations, their mutual benefit of cross-fertilization, overlapping of each other's energy.

As a teenager I moved to the US to finish high school. It was an invaluable liberating experience; I started looking at reality

from a completely different perspective. And very soon, when the Balkan socio-political turmoil broke into a homeland war, all of a sudden, we woke up in a different country, in a different political and economic system.

Such critical and unstable life conditions demand of people to develop critical consciousness. It helped me to discover importance of contextualization — for context is necessary to understand the text. A necessity of self-teaching, an ongoing learning not restricted to a single discipline. Comprehension gained by lived experience is far more important than borrowed conservative knowledge. Erudition can be misleading; therefore, a need for *unlearning* through constant questioning and critical thinking; *experiencing* as a way of authentic inductive comprehension and learning.

I see distinct links between architecture and society, between pedagogy and society, and the importance of dialogue as the key tool for social progress. As Freire argues, liberation can be reached through education (Freire, 1989). In my case, the experience of psychotherapy was especially meaningful; a liberating dynamic of dialogue-crisis, having to erase previous 'knowledge' hindering my pursuit of self-actualization. Gradually, an awareness of my own private 'oppression' started to take its uncanny shape, and eventually a transformative power of generating a question: why?

To live in a marginal turbulent country in constant social and political transition; what does it really mean? Maybe the only way to live a free and authentic life is to live it in the margins, off-center (under the condition to be one's own self and not referential, of course). To discover and live one's own inner truth, as Emerson beautifully put it:

"To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men — that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be the universal sense; for the inmost in due time becomes the outmost. A man should learn to detect and watch that gleam of light which flashes across his mind from within. Yet he dismisses without notice his thought, because it is his… Great works of art teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. Else tomorrow a stranger will say with masterly good sense precisely what we have thought and felt all the time, and we shall be forced to take with shame our own opinion from another."

(R. W. Emerson, Self-Reliance, 1841)

AN OPEN DIALOGUE

In one of the essays on architectural education posted in his famous blog, Lebbeus Woods (Woods, 2015) writes about the relationship between teachers and students as "equal partners" in that their roles depend equally upon each other. He offers an ancient example — Athenian academy — as the most basic sort of school, and the most famous of which is described in Plato's Dialogues, where the teacher was Socrates. Woods writes:

"It is telling that Plato's account of Socrates' academy is called the 'Dialogues' and not the 'Monologues.' While a teacher such as Protagoras preferred to give lectures — monologues — displaying his wisdom, Socrates method of getting at the truth — which he believed was the goal of knowledge — involved the back-and-forth, the give-and-take, the vigorous exchange of views between individuals who were free to develop their own thoughts and understandings. Because these were bound to be different, the dialogues are filled with arguments and counterarguments which advance step-by-step, focusing on key questions, toward a conclusion. Socrates questioned everything, especially his own knowledge and assumptions. The conclusions arrived at by this method were not known in advance. It is easy to understand why the Socratic method has had such a great influence on Western science, art, philosophy, and learning — it frees the mind and liberates its creative powers." (Woods, 2009)

Obviously, the pedagogical dialogue "is not between the teacher and the learner but rather among learners, of whom the teacher is one" (Vella, 2002).

Learning is never a monologue: it is a dynamic interactive dialogue between a person and their context — therefore, it is a systemic phenomenon. Learning, like creation, takes place in relation. Life happens in the interval of matter. In the magnetic field — a space-time interval of change — a new form of life is created. Transformative encounter with the world — this what Salman Rushdie calls a 'shock of life'. As he poetically describes it: "Literature is made at the boundary between self and the world, and during the creative act this borderline softens, turns penetrable and allows the world to flow into the artist and the artist to flow into the world." (S. Rushdie, as quoted by Pallasmaa, 2007) To paraphrase Salman Rushdie in relation to pedagogical process, we could speculate that teaching / learning is a process at the boundary between teacher and student; during the creative act this borderline softens, turns penetrable, and allows teacher to flow into the student and student to flow into the teacher.

The intention is to investigate phenomena that take place in the *active void* — a magnetic field in-between polarities — in the intervals at the *borderline territory*. The aim is to examine how complex experience of transgressing personal reference frames can trigger a process of growth. Transition between inside and outside is explored through cultural media of art and architecture, as well as through relational psychoanalysis. Phenomenology of the inside–outside relation in spatial perception of architecture is compared to the one in psychoanalytical dynamics.

CROSSING THE BORDER

In his book 'Psychoanalysis and Architecture: The Inside and the Outside' psychoanalyst Cosimo Schinaia recognizes an intrinsic ambivalence in the concept of border, for it simultaneously implies two contrasting functions: separation and interrelation (Schinaia, 2016). The former — separation — is a static domain of belonging; embracing tradition, identity preservation, exclusivity, reductionism, possible conflict, and eventual degradation. On the other hand, the latter function — that of interrelation — is a dynamic domain of displacement; it can be symbolized by bridge, transition, exchange, permeability, inclusivity, flow. The notion of border as dividing / isolating is essentially an intellectual construct, analytical and artificial; psychologically implying fear, and ultimately death. On the other hand, the integrative border, as active and synthesizing, belongs to the domain of Nature, creativity, love and life.

Latest findings in science have shown an innate interconnectedness in the universe — a natural osmosis existing both in microcosmos as in the domain of macrocosms. This actually confirms that the concept of border as separative is an artificial construct. Because borders are not established in order to separate differences — on the contrary; differences are the very result of creating borders.

Spatial boundaries between interior and exterior are the materialization of the human need for shelter and protection, and — at the same time — of man's ancient fear of the unknown. Traditionally, threat 'of the outside world' was perceived in the exterior space; so, boundaries were established to eliminate the eternal discomfort of the unknown — of the uncanny. A century ago, Siegmund Freud wrote his famous essay "Das Unheimliche" (Freud, 1919). It translates literally as "un-homely" — that which is contrary to one's sense of home; a threat to personal identity. In man's fear of the uncanny Freud discovered an interesting paradox: The aim toward security never succeeds in eliminating the anxiety that causes it. What

actually causes the anxiety, is the suppressed knowledge. So what man fears is not outside, but within himself. And the only way to regain that knowledge is to step out of the protective identity frame and confront the unknown as it is — not as it is neurotically feared to be. This means to experience the world afresh, like a child — reality as it actually is, unhindered by fear or trauma, living the full potential of here-and-now.

To accept such challenge demands taking a huge risk — daring to leave the seductive security of stereotypes of the everyday, and to set on a journey of discovery — even though the anxiety of experiencing outer space may never vanish; because it is evolutional, written in human genes.

As Elizabeth Ellsworth points out, learning is a risky experience to take. It is very interesting to discover the etymology of the word 'experience' is the same one as of the word 'experiment' — both of them originally implying: to risk, to try in the outside space (Ellsworth, 2005). Maybe this could explain why the experimental process that takes place at architecture school laboratory entails so much discomfort, and why gaining experience is not always easy. It involves learning "how to negotiate and act upon our own purposes, values, feelings and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others" (Mezirow, 2000). According to Mezirow, the transformative process is circumscribed by a frame of reference. Frames of reference are structures of assumptions and expectations that frame an individual's tacit point of view and influence their thinking, beliefs, and actions. It is the *revision of a frame of reference* together with *reflection on experience* addressed by the perspective transformation: a paradigmatic shift (Taylor, 2008).

Phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty, on the other hand, is immersed in experience, when he writes: "The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside of myself" (Merleau-Ponty, 1945).

The first 'journey of enlightenment' recorded in history was published in Venice in 1499, and is attributed to Francesco Colonna (Pérez-Gómez, 2006). "Hypnerotomachia Poliphili" (The Dream of Poliphilus) is an illustrated pilgrimage toward Illumination through love.

The traveler sets on a journey of discovery — he leaves his place of origin, abandons the familiar, his comfort zone. In an act of displacement, he crosses the border. This new experience provides him with a shift in perspective — he becomes an outsider, a stranger, the 'Other'. The position of 'otherness' is complex and unstable — constantly oscillating between extremes — certainty vs. uncertainty, known vs. unknown, attachment vs. detachment — being inside and outside at the same time. This creates a tension that attracts psychic

energy, motivates and animates perception. The traveler — just like Klee's 'teacher — "observes what goes unnoticed by the crowd" (Klee, 1925).

Displacement is a position of insecurity, but it also enables an anti-conformist attitude, open-mindedness, flexibility and curiosity. Lack of knowledge can even generate desire, passion for knowledge. Nomadic communication and transgressive ideas disturb the existing social discourse. Cultural crossbreeding is a fertile ground for innovation and discovery. It is a two-way street: "Energy of life enhancement can only come with the meeting of a stranger." (Sperber, 2016)

PHENOMENOLOGY OF MONTAGE: OVERLAPPING THE INTERIOR AND THE EXTERIOR

In visual arts, montage of 'fragments of reality' creates a magnetic field — a dynamic equilibrium between polarities. The space–time interval between the fragments challenges and stimulates the viewer, contributing to new understanding. The creative process starts with a sense that something is not as it should be; there is a puzzle, a conflict; a desire to be satisfied, thus having a stimulating effect upon the observer (Hill, 2003).

In architecture, montage of fragmented boundaries is a way of motivating desire to discover the space. The design process is seen as a relation, a dialogue between the project and the landscape. Such production of architecture as 'landscape' is inseparable of its *context*, in natural osmosis with the place. Its tools are integrating boundaries, an erosion of the borders between inside and outside. An implosion of landscape inside the house; where the Infinite enters. The goal is to intensify comprehension by means of de-automation of perception. Spatial multilayeredness of *in-between spaces* dissolves the boundaries between the interior and the exterior, stimulating desire to gradually reveal the space, through its flow and transparencies.

Phenomenology of such transition was ingeniously described by Herman Hertzberger for the 1985 Paris Biennale entitled 'Vu de l'interieur ou la raison de l'architecture' (A View from the Interior or Reason for Architecture): "As we change from place to place, what we experience is a multitude of impressions which give rise to associations and echo degrees of interiority and exteriority within each one of us*" (Hertzberger, in Nouvel, 1985).

Space–time intervals between interior and exterior create a complex spatial experience of integrating relationships. In the vertical plane, montage of fragments frames and re-frames the horizon through opening and boundary. In depth, montage of filters or layers along the path of architectural promenade, enabling passing through or stopping. A full sensory and in-

tellectual animation arouses. This *revitalizing irritation of senses* promotes action and change, motivating the desire to unveil the hidden. At the same time, it enables a metaphysical transition of personal borders; an immersion into one's own interiority in a pursuit for authenticity.

In relational psychoanalysis, there is an analogue in the *intersubjective osmosis* — a field between self and other, between inside and outside. As Winnicott explains in his seminal work 'Playing and Reality', it is a *transitional space* between the subjective space of the child and the objective space of the external reality (Winnicott, 1971). This inside–outside relation is an overlapping of two worlds, a juxtaposition of two cultural references. The psychoanalytic relational dialectic between inside and outside is a nonlinear dynamic process of alternating projections and introjections, of mirroring and transference.

Every genuine progression / learning challenges our capacity to tolerate the uncertainty — awareness of incoherent elements in the process of becoming, process of transformation. This is a crisis of fragile 'Self in transition' (Ellsworth, 2005). It is a process that investigates psychical and physical boundaries of self and other, our mind and the world, complexity of being inside and outside at the same time (Sperber, 2016). In this process a good analyst (or a good architecture teacher) is not self-referential and closed, but is patiently listening, open-minded towards other contexts, other frames of reference and other points of view, considerate for personal sensitivities.

A good teacher does not resort to criticizing the student, but rather applies a *positive psychology* approach, as suggested by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi: "treatment is not just fixing what is broken; it is nurturing what is best, to build on strengths and learn from challenges." (Csikszentmihalyi, 2000)

ARCHITECTURE SCHOOL: A TRANSFORMATIVE ENCOUNTER

Architectural education of today — if it intends to educate individuals able to cope with the ever more complex demands of a dynamic world — needs to be transdisciplinary education. It needs to promote collaboration, the exchanging of ideas, and — especially — it must value students' personal experience. Teaching students to value their own authentic personal experience is an important lesson in self-reliance, ever more indispensable for computer generations. Csikszentmihalyi's seminal research showed direct colleration between personal experience and creativity: the bigger personal experience, the better creative skills and learning abilities (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Architecture students in design studios are motivated to think, reflect, ask

themselves about the purpose, essence of the task, encouraged to further research and experimentation. It is a mutual dedication — an open process of reciprocal interpretation, developing individual personal abilities, and actualization of potentials.

In the process of becoming oneself, self-reliance augments resilience of an individual, helping to deal with unforseen circumstances of change and challenge. While fostering self-reliance in students, it is necessary to induce a shift in perspective regarding notions of 'success' and 'failure'. *Process of growth* is of greater value than the outcome (than perfection). The aim is not 'mastery' but embracing the transitional state as a phase in the process. As mentioned before, transformative encounter of self with the world brings a change in perspective — a paradigmatic shift (Mezirow, 2000). In the process, teacher is a catalyst: listening, observing, wondering, mirroring, responding: communicating authentically (Winnicott, 1971).

According to Csikszentmihaly, 'creative personality' contains conflicting traits, often alternating between contradictory extremes, and having a multifaceted perspective: it is "multitude, instead of one" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996). Therefore, the teacher must be capable of dynamically operating at different ends of those polarities; switching from passionate to objective, from attachment to detachment. Moreover, the teacher must be aware of his/her own will to transform. The goal is developing the student's specific abilities. And the reward is the moment in which the student surprises him/herself (Winnicott, 1971). Or, as Ellsworth put it: "It is a discovery of emerging of a new self." (Ellsworth, 2005)

Learning is a vital dynamic of self-change, of the self-oscillating between creative dissolution and self-augmentation; like inhaling-exhaling, like entering-exiting. Aldo Van Eyck introduced the idea of architecture breathing: "that you cannot leave a real place without entering another. Departure must mean entry" (Van Eyck, in Nouvel, 1985). The transformative encounter is an open process, a two-way, exchangeable relationship.

In the field of psychology, a prerequisite for learning is 'unlearning' (Rank, 1932). These are two interdependent processes: in order to grow, and learn more creative ways of thinking, feeling, and being in the here-and-now, one must 'unlearn' self-destructive ways of thinking, feeling, and being in the here-and-now.

The process of *unlearning* starts with a new, transcultural experience, inducing a shift in perspective, followed by critical reflection, and a discomfort prior to discovery. "But there are also those who deliberately refuse to learn. New ideas suggesting new behaviors may be deliberately suppressed because they contradict established values and accepted traditions.

It is that the truth contradicts existing personal values, or that it demands facing unpleasant risks." (Revans, as quoted in Pedler, Shih-Wei, 2014)

To 'unlearn' can also be to legitimate knowledges that are subjugated or silenced within existing, predominant theories, and practices. To develop ability to 'unlearn' — radically questioning power relations — can be a means by which people can become more inovative through resisting and transcending their confining social contexts (Unger, as quoted in Pedler, Shih-Wei, 2014). However, it requires a radical democratic context and self-reflective individuals able to express ideas and values that are not necessarily consistent with the dominant, institutionalised theories and practices (Chokr, as quoted in Pedler, Shih-Wei, 2014).

"To achieve progress, we have to look for new approaches and change the very way we think. Our common modes of thinking are organized in (specialized) professional fields and implemented through sophisticated organizational structures and processes. Yet, as the challenges before us become more complex and networked, innovation often seems to occur between disciplinary fields and outside of established organizations, for example, in the unstructured activities of startup ecosystems. Highly innovative people these days are often the ones who traverse disciplinary boundaries, who happen to bring deep knowledge and skills of several fields to bear on a problem or an opportunity, combining practices in a way that creates new value" (Gardner, 2006).

LIFE BEYOND THE BORDER

It is obvious that architecture education — that is, the process of both teaching and learning architecture — requires us to be deeply honest with ourselves, demanding an intense personal integrity. "But most of all, it demands that we stand open to experience, that we recapture our ability to see life and others afresh, as though through the eyes of a child, to learn how to tap into our intuition. It demands that we cease to seek refuge in what we know and constantly explore and learn from what we do not know. It demands that we live the questions rather than the answers." (Zohar, Marshall, 2000)

Both in his art and in teaching at the Bauhaus, Paul Klee's approach was inductive and phenomenological. By recognizing the big in the small, he discovered the hidden spirit of things. By observing the smallest manifestation of form and interrelation, he arrived at a conclusion about the inner essence — the formative reason of matters (Klee, 1925). From specificity to complexity, from local to universal — not unlike our Traveler:

"It is the mission of the teacher to observe what goes unnoticed by the multitude. He is an interpreter of signs", he claims (Klee, 1925). Exactitude winged by intuition is a tool with which forms, derived from nature and culture, are transformed into signs which redirect attention from the surface to spiritual reality. Form is not an image, but a system for structuring an object.

Authenticity of expression results from a journey to one's own inner self and sharing one's own contemplative experience with another. As Thoreau said about the lake: "It is Earth's eye; looking into which the beholder measures the depth of his own nature." (Thoreau, 1854). To dive into the lake means to cross the border, to enter a different kind of space in which different laws rule. Gaston Bachelard dealt with this in his 'Poetics of Space': "To go down into the water, or to wander in the desert, is to change space, and by changing space, by leaving the space of one's usual sensibilities, one enters into communication with a space that is psychically innovating. Neither in the desert nor on the bottom of the sea does one's spirit remain sealed and indivisible... For we do not change place, we change our nature." (Bachelard, 1958)

In his booklet for Bauhaus students, Klee describes two kinds of spiral movement: "Lengthening of the radius creates a vibrant spiral. Shortening of the radius narrows the curve more and more till the static centre. The direction determines either a gradual liberation from the centre through freer and freer motions, or an increasing dependence on an eventually destructive centre. This is the question of life and death; and the decision rests with the small arrow" (Klee, 1925). Paul Klee's metaphysical arrow demonstrates duality between human ideological capacity to move and desire to expand his/her reach, and human physical limitations. Despite the paradox, Klee incites Bauhaus students to be winged arrows aiming high, at fulfillment and goal (Klee, 1925).

This is what Pérez-Gómez calls "architectural longing for ethics and aesthetics" (Pérez-Gómez, 2006); longing for a better and more beautiful world, driven by powers of Eros and Philia. Eros and Philia — love and empathy — are forces that have built our entire human world. Human desire for a better and more beautiful world is a desire of ethical and aesthetic nature. People constantly seek something; a lack is forever present. Manifesting as a spatial and temporal desire / suffering for the unobtainable, this immanent lack has a motivating potential, Pérez-Gómez argues. Might it not be used as a tool for production of knowledge? The aim is to reach the presence in here-and-now, a gap between past and future. This is the 'active void', the space–time interval of change; a life-productive borderline territory.
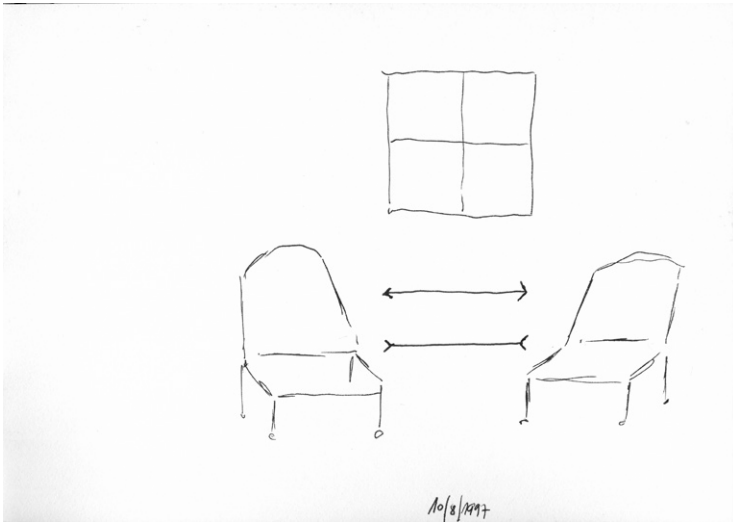
Fig. 1: My room, I and Thou, L.P., psychoanalist, NYC, 1997
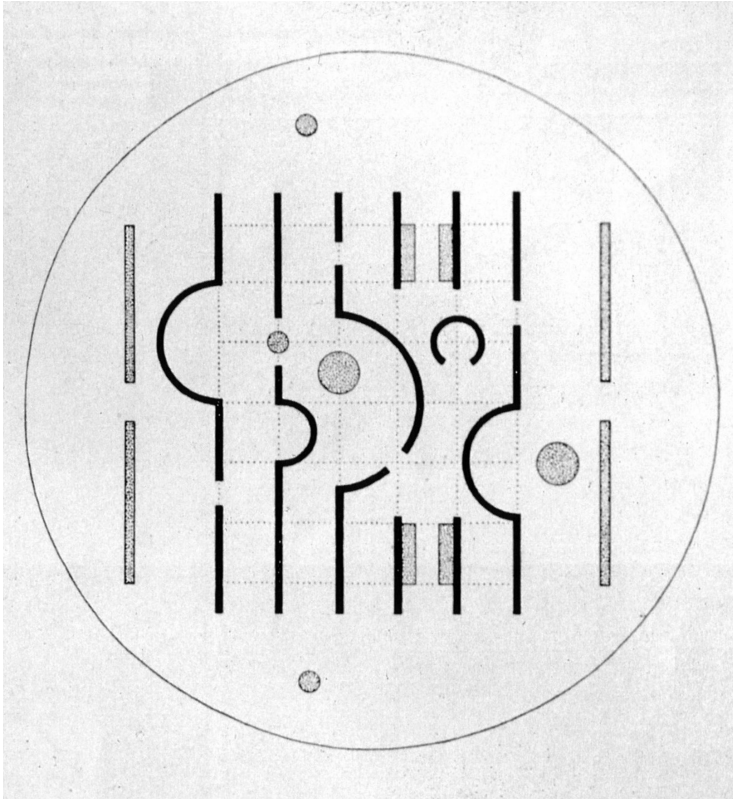(project author: Aleksandra Wagner)

Fig. 2: Aldo van Eyck: Sculpture Pavilion, Sonsbeek Exhibition. Arnhem, 1965–66

IIII. (37) (38)

(37) **The Arrow.**

The father of the arrow is the thought: how do I expand my reach? Over this river? This lake? That mountain?

The contrast between man's ideological capacity to move at random through material and metaphysical spaces and his physical limitations, is the origin of all human tragedy. It is this contrast between power and prostration that implies the duality of human existence. Half winged—half imprisoned, this is man!

Thither!
Fig. 68

Thought is the mediary between earth and world. The broader the magnitude of his reach, the more painful man's tragic limitation. To be impelled toward motion and not to be the motor! Action bears this out.

there liberation
Thither!
Here Restriction
Fig 69

How does the arrow overcome the hindering friction? Never quite to get where motion is interminate.
Revelation: that nothing that has a start can have infinity.
Consolation: a bit farther than customary!—than possible?
Be winged arrows, aiming at fulfillment and goal, even though you will tire without having reached the mark.

(38) An actual arrow consists of shaft
point
feathering
(rudder)

The symbolic arrow is direction
with point
and feathering
combined as
point-rudder.

Fig 70

Equal length of the point-rudder and equal degrees of the point-rudder from the shaft, result in straight flight (Fig. 71: $a=b; \alpha=\beta$).
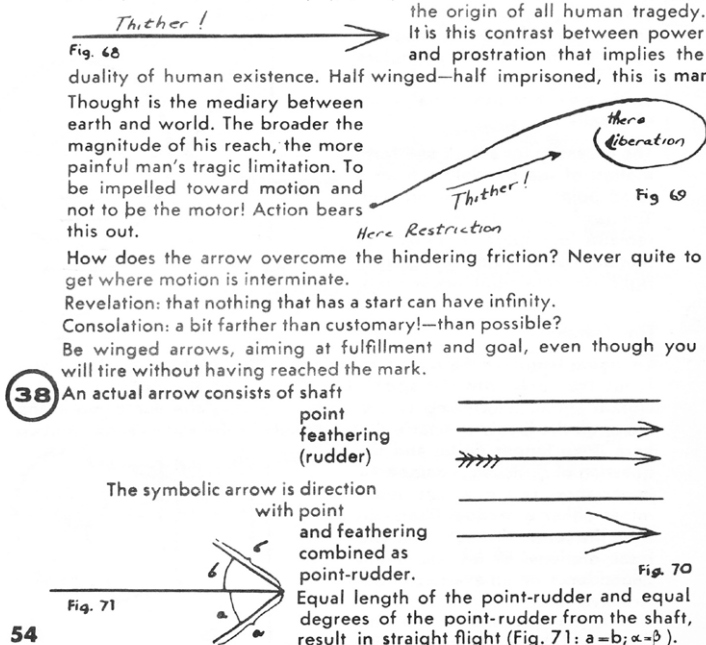
Fig. 71

54

Fig. 3: Arrow, in: Pedagogical Sketchbook, Paul Klee, teaching students at Bauhaus, (teacher: Ivan Crnković)

Fig. 4a: A view from the interior into the left side (student-author: Lovorka Prpić, teachers: Paul Klee via Ivan Crnković)
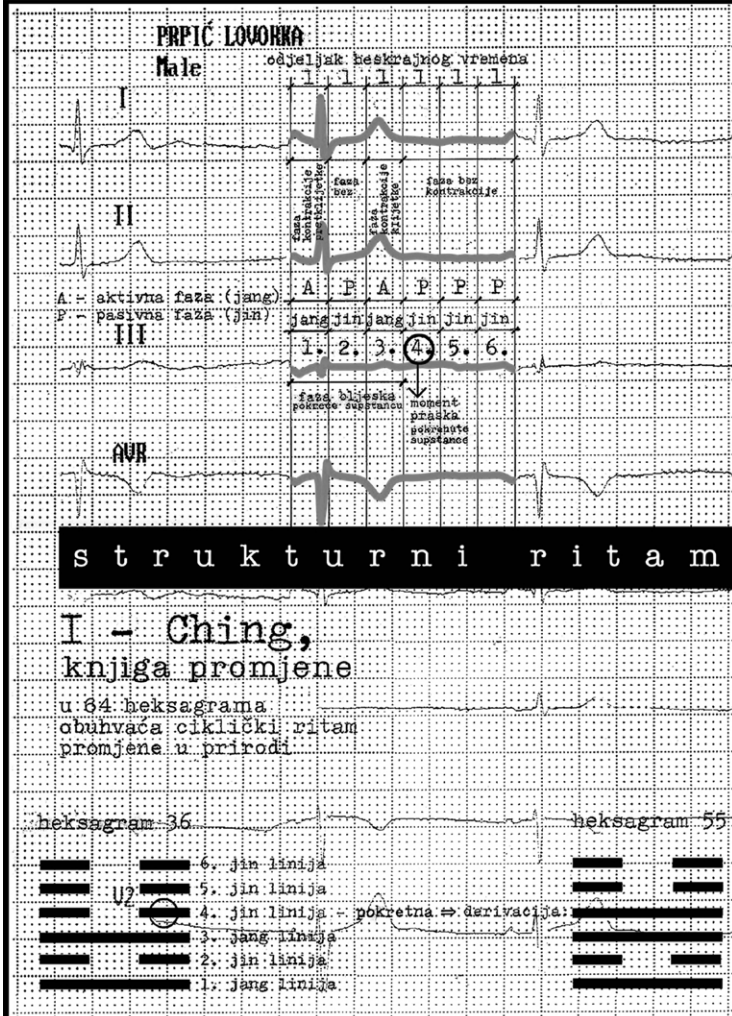
Fig. 4b: A view from the interior into the left side _excerpt (student-author: Lovorka Prpić, teachers: Paul Klee via Ivan Crnković)

Fig. 5: Joint cell (student-author: Lovorka Prpić, teacher: Cedric Price)

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