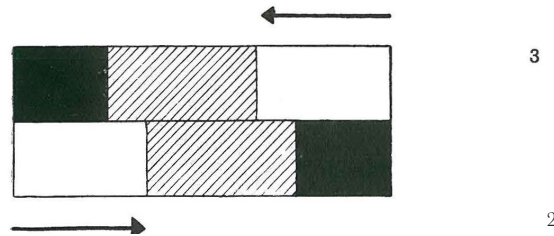
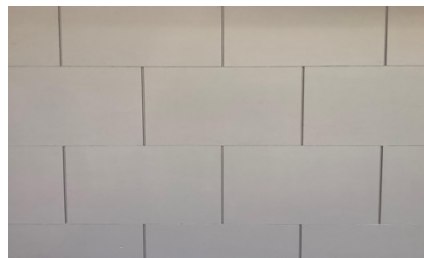


THROUGH BREUER'S THINKING EYE: THE GRIECO HOUSE

In his lectures at the Bauhaus, Paul Klee has been teaching his students the significance of time and space in the arts. To create a connection between forms of nature, abstract thought, rhythm and experience, Klee spoke to his students of pattern and movement in these lectures. For Klee the horizontal effect of the grid pattern was “an epic tempo against the dramatic of the vertical”¹; it was meant to bring comfort and relaxation to oppose tension which was believed to be expressed in the verticality of the working life.



Among his students was the designer and architect Marcel Breuer who seem to have adopted these forms literally into his modernist architecture. The garage door of Breuer's Grieco House depicts this exact pattern as depicted in the first volume of Klee's published Bauhaus lectures *The Thinking Eye (Das bildnerische Denken)* (1971[1990]). Everyone who sees the house is captured by it right away but cannot tell why.



¹ Klee, Paul. *Das bildnerische Denken*. Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1971 [1990].

² Ibid 224.

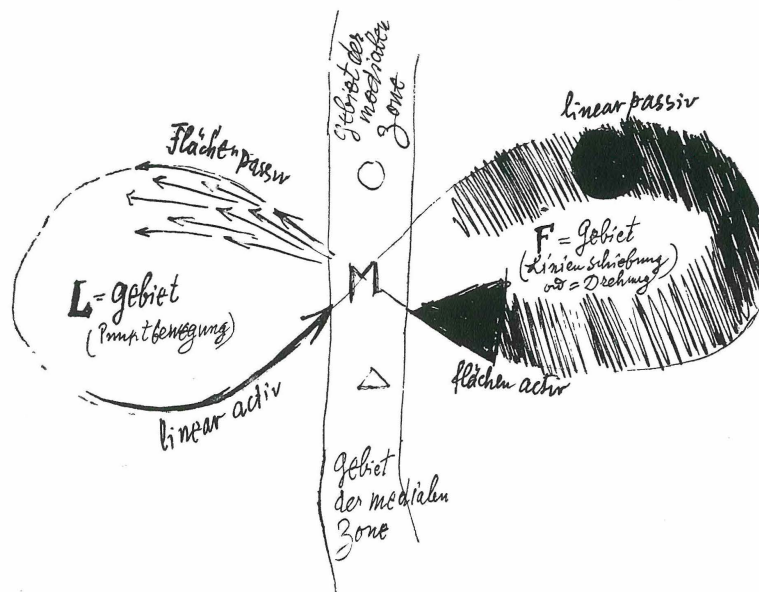
The horizontal layering is a warm come back to home. It has possibly been designed to undo the sense of rising verticality of the working mind so that the contrasting horizontal would evoke a grounding effect. Unrolling like a camera film at a far distance, it would also indicate to being back at home to a life of inner relaxation and continuity.

In Breuer's modernist architecture, as in most modernist architecture, the charm of a relaxed life at home has mainly been drawn in from the garden. It creates a distinct relationship with nature. As one walks from the garage door to the front garden of the Grieco House, one is surrounded by mature plants circling a pond. At first the pond seems like an ordinary oval shaped stone structure with a small waterfall. On the other side of the pond is another oval form, same size as the pond, made of blue stones and looks like a resting patio to enjoy the view and the pond. From that perspective it is almost impossible to recognize by the human eye as something of significance.

From the living room, the view looking down over the garden however allows the eye to grasp the intended effect:

Active, middle, passive: Summary¹

4



3

³ Ibid 120. Here Klee draws on the relationship between active, passive and intermediary conditions. More on Klee's ideas on human perception of rhythm see page 268. Same form is depicted as the underlying principle of the

The architecture of the Breuer pond is exactly the same as the diagram drawn by Paul Klee. In *The Thinking Eye*, Klee uses this diagram to understand life as well as the active and passive elements that create it. Breuer implements one of the key principles of Klee's teachings here: the eternal transformation of life energy into light from passive to active forms (light being the active energy form in Breuer's case). Taking this form as an archetype, the architect seems to have crafted a pond and a resting patio to channel sunlight using the gravitational lightness of water and heaviness of the blue stones.



During six months of the year, starting around the spring equinox and continuing late into the Fall, this pond reflects sunlight at a specific angle torching it high up into the house over the ceiling of the living room. Then, around two hours before the sunset, one feels dipped in a play of light expressing the movement of nature over the pond through waves created by fish,

“cosmic rhythm” as well as that of the flow of blood and other fluid elements found inside the human body and in nature.

leaves, and insects. On a windy day, the pond reflects an intensity of a waterfall over the ceiling. Projected over the curtains, the waterfall creates a translucent effect as if one could walk through it. The pond becomes a vessel of energy transforming images into light and recreating new images inside the house by design and by meticulous calculation around the movement of the sun.

One cannot help but think that the waterfall addresses Frank Lloyd Wright's the Falling Water—as it was Wright who was initially commissioned to build a house for the Grieco family. After all the plans were drawn and construction was planned, a disagreement on a window in one of the bathrooms forced the Griecos to choose another architect and approach Breuer. Taking up a project after Lloyd Wright, Breuer seems to have been thinking about the challenging suburban site while addressing the naturalist architect's Falling Water with a Bauhaus sensibility: the fact that inside the home, inside the mind, we live through the images of nature. As a result, an eternal cinematographic art installation emerges through his architecture.

As the sun begins to set and the light moves from the pond towards the blue stones, the light in the house gains a new momentum. This time, the sunrays torch into the lower level of the house and light through the staircase which leads up into the center of the house. An immense ball of light emerges in the middle of the house torching in from down below. It feels as if the sun sinks right below one's own feet like a giant ball of fire.

The Grieco House built upon a rock on the Sunset Rock Road can be read as an homage to Paul Klee's art and teachings in *The Thinking Eye* through this and many other elements that compose the house like a symphony. With light becoming cinematographic image and moving through the house, one lives through Paul Klee's magical symbolism implemented through Breuer's thinking eye.

