

# Visual Thinking in Organizational Life

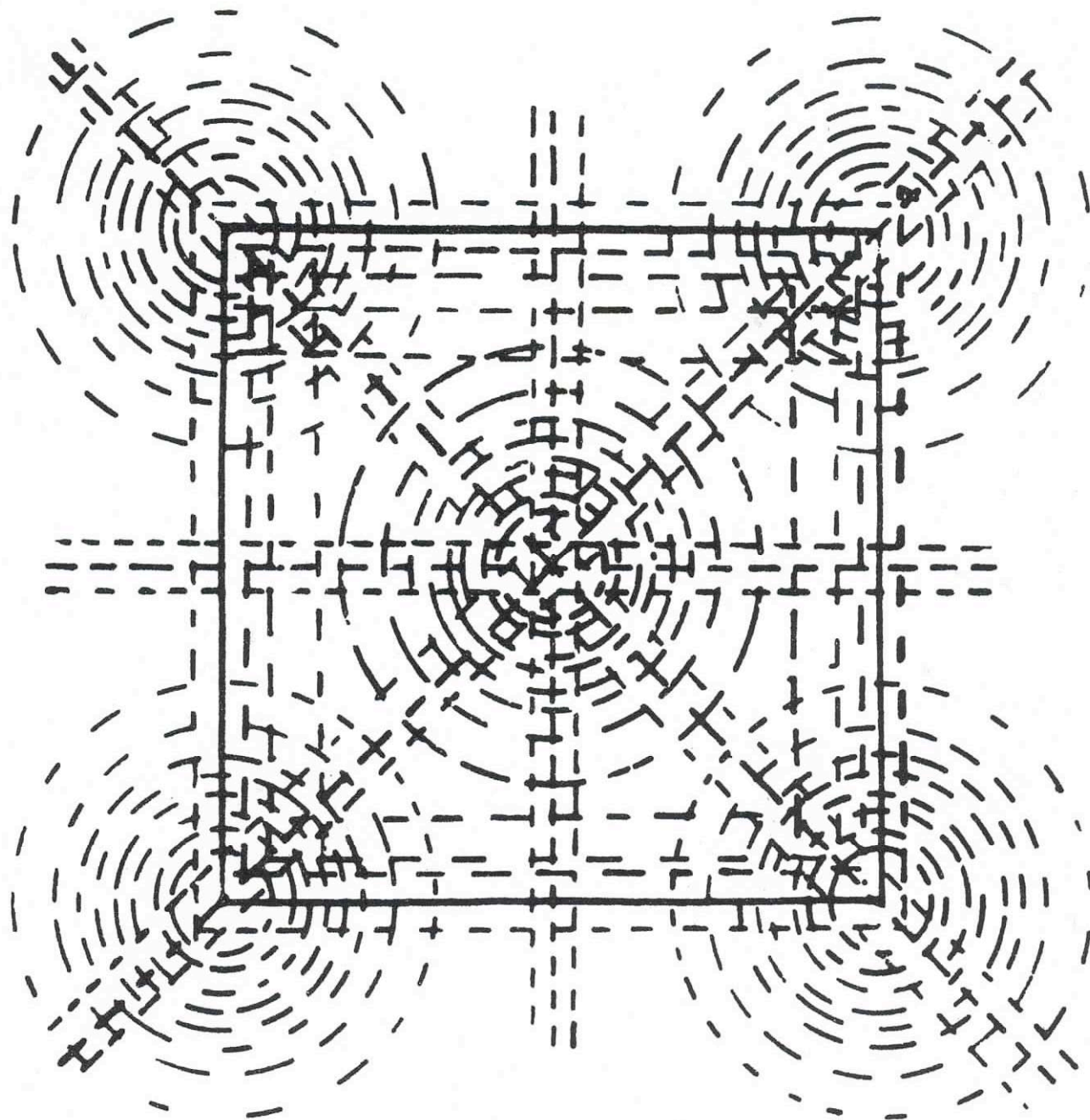
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Cleveland, Ohio

What I am going to talk about is something strange, peculiar, and possibly crazy. It could even be wrong.

When we honor the memory of a path creating scholar like Claudio, we have an obligation to stretch our thinking beyond the familiar. But perhaps not this far.

I have long been fascinated by visual thinking, especially the work of Rudolph Arnheim. I am also inspired by the the writings of John Dewey, and his premise that thinking always involves feeling and doing.

My talk today is a sort of meditation on the following evocative drawing of the visual thinking field of forces by Arnheim:



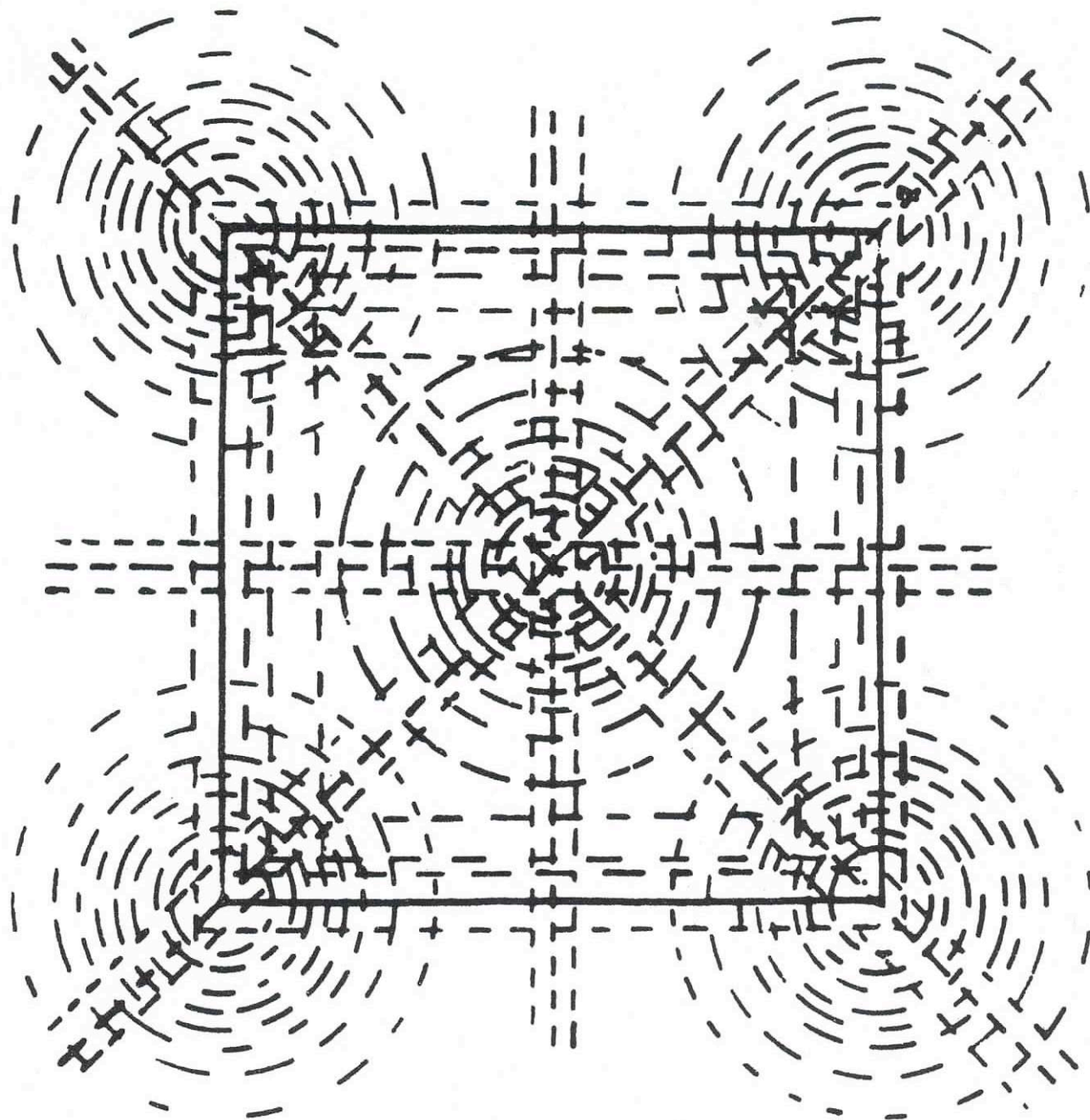
I ask the following question: Can this depiction of a visual force field help us in searching for a phenomenological understanding of technology and organizations?

As Claudio asked:

“How to get closer to practice, then, and the real life of systems in use in a fresher way?”...

“ This is the domain of existing in the world.”

“Hence, a different perspective on information systems should be anchored to the unfolding of the human process of encountering the everyday world” (The Labyrinths of Information)



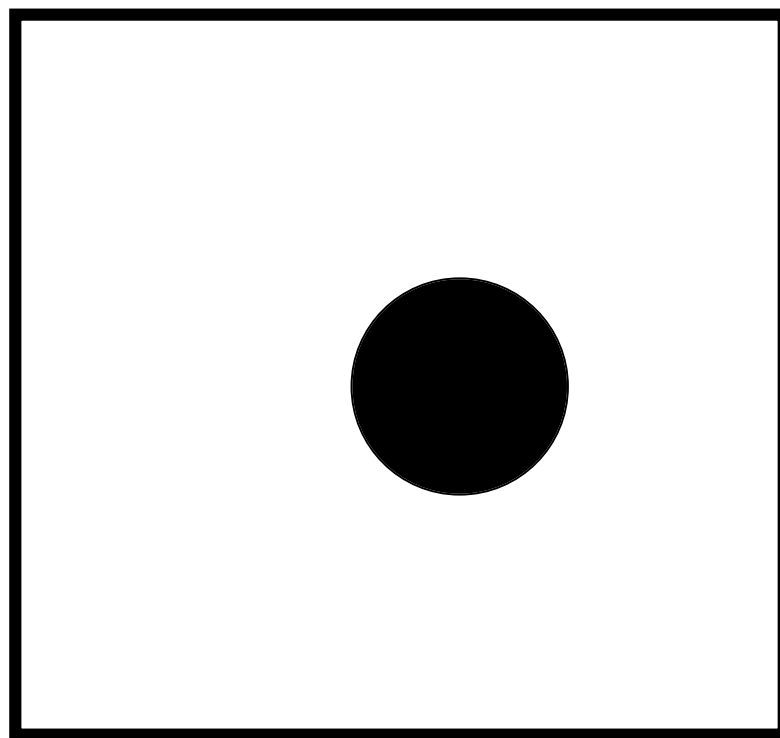
# Centricity and Eccentricity

Centric tendency: See self as center of world

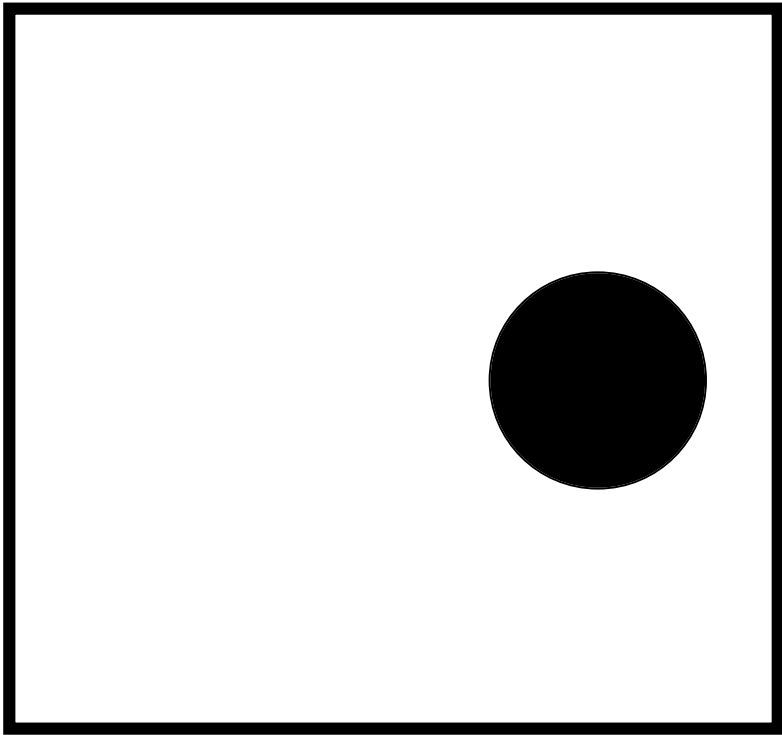
Eccentric tendency: Realize that own center is one among many, and that any action of the center is directed toward an outer goal.

“...the interaction of the two tendencies is a fundamental task of life.”

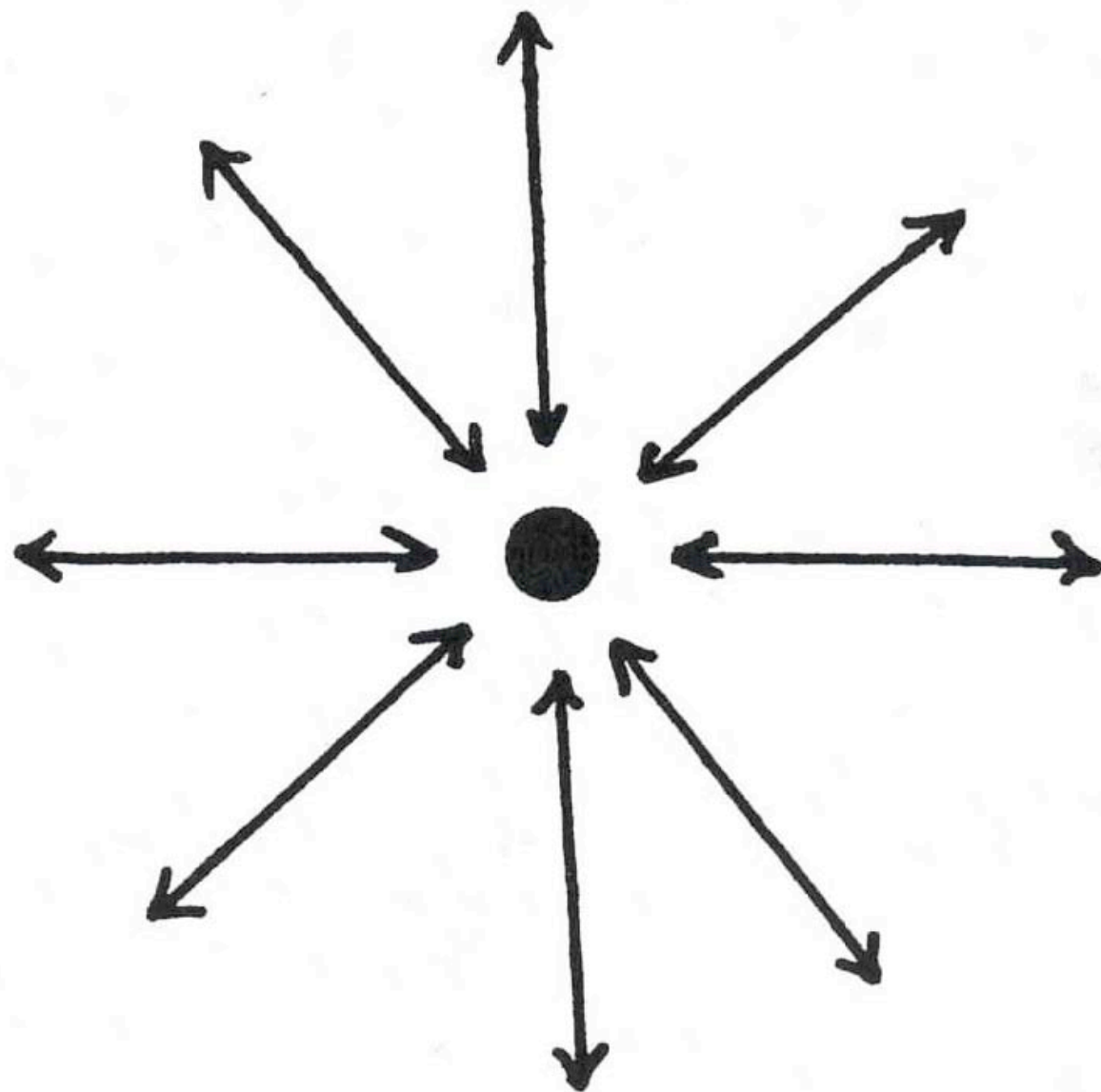
Rudolph Arnheim, The Power of the Center



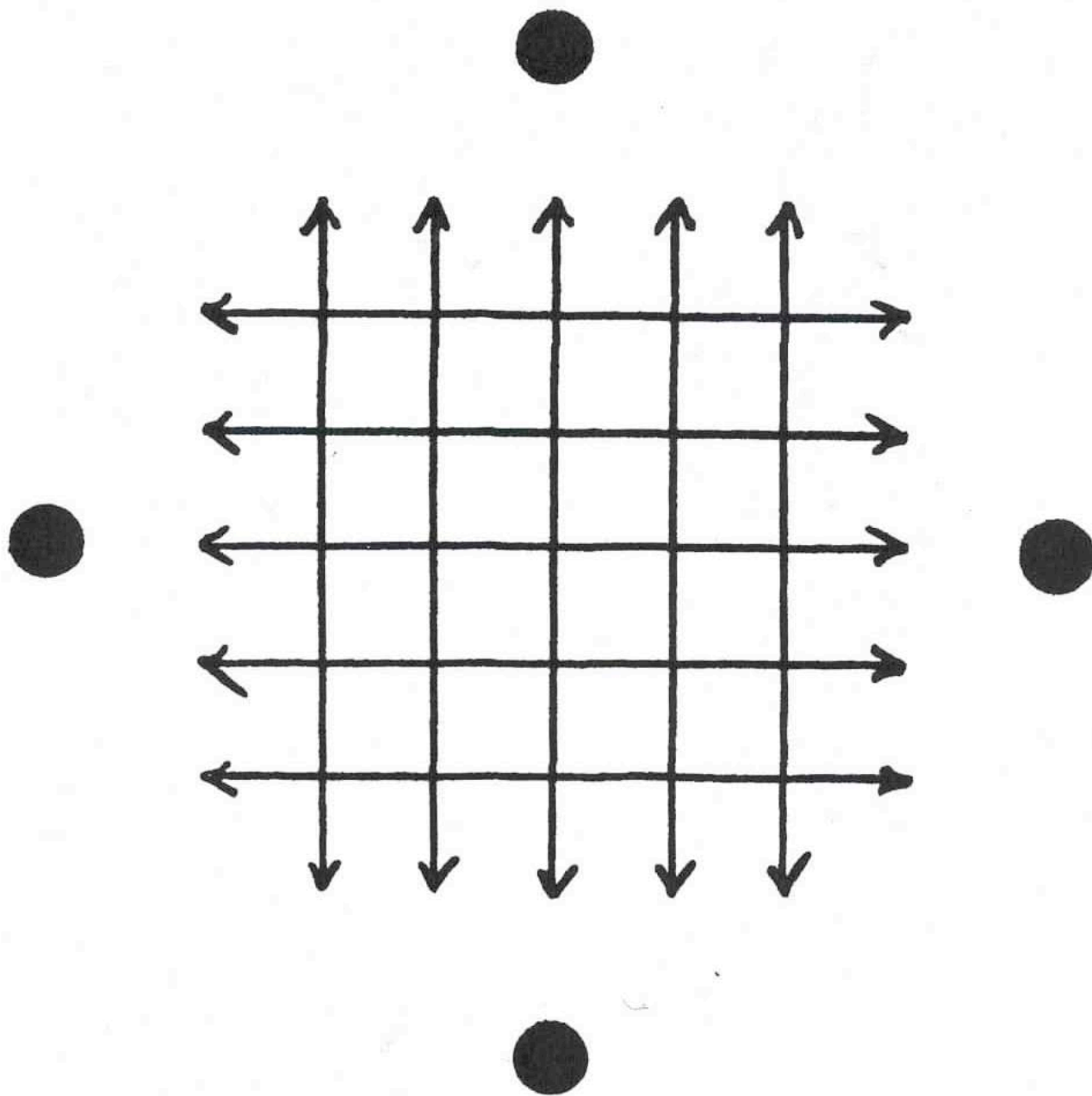




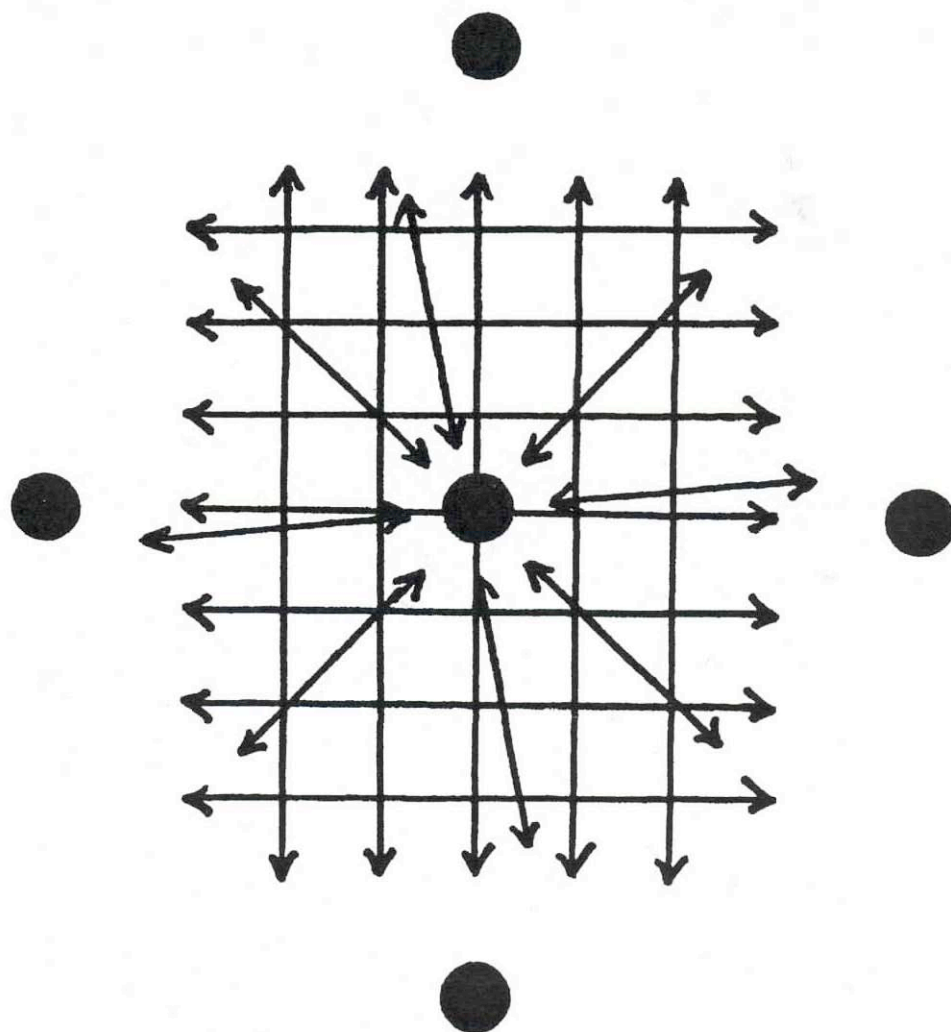
Arnheim uses vectors to depict the dynamics of a centric field. Vectors always imply both Action and Resistance.



Recognizing eccentric tendencies can allow  
for a grid of vectors.

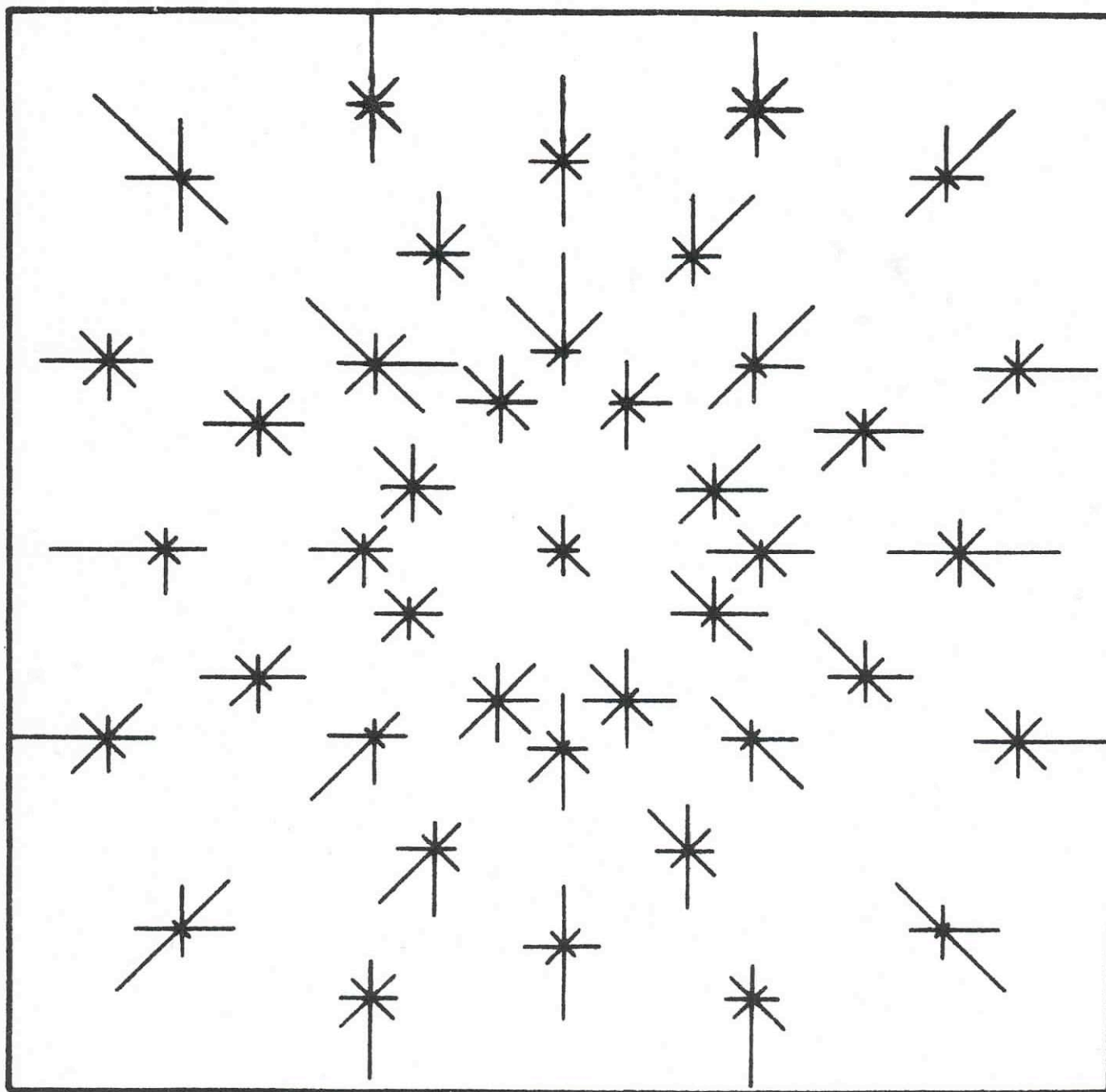


And Arnheim's evocative image of the dynamics of a visual force field is an elaboration of overlaying the centric and eccentric vector fields.



Arnheim notes that Gestalt Psychology experiments have traced the perception of different valences for the vectors, depending on their location in the vector field.





On Gestalt experiments:

“A thoughtful person cannot read these studies without admiring the active striving for unity and order manifest in the simple act of looking at a simple pattern of lines.”

“Far from being a mechanical recording of sensory elements, vision proved to be a truly creative apperception of reality - imaginative, inventive, shrewd, and beautiful.”

Rudolph Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception

Vision is “...the apprehension of significant structural patterns.”

“All perceiving is also thinking,  
All reasoning is also intuition,  
All observation is also invention.”

Rudolph Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception

What we perceive is, “...perhaps first of all, an interplay of directed tensions.”

“Because they have magnitude and direction, these tensions can be described as psychological forces”

Rudolph Arnheim, Art and Visual Perception

“...life goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it.”

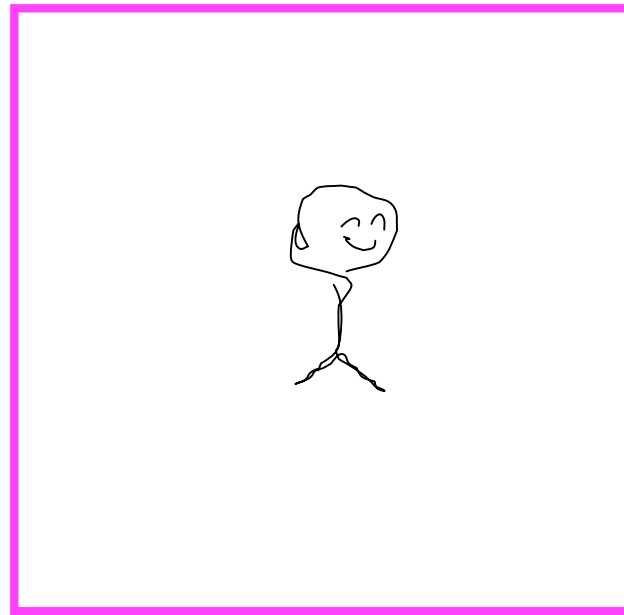
“Equilibrium comes about not mechanically and inertly, but out of, and because of tension.”

John Dewey, Art as Experience 1934

“Up and down, back and front, to and fro, this side and that, - or right and left - here and there, *feel* differently. The reason they do is that they are not static points in something, but are objects in movement, qualitative changes of value.”

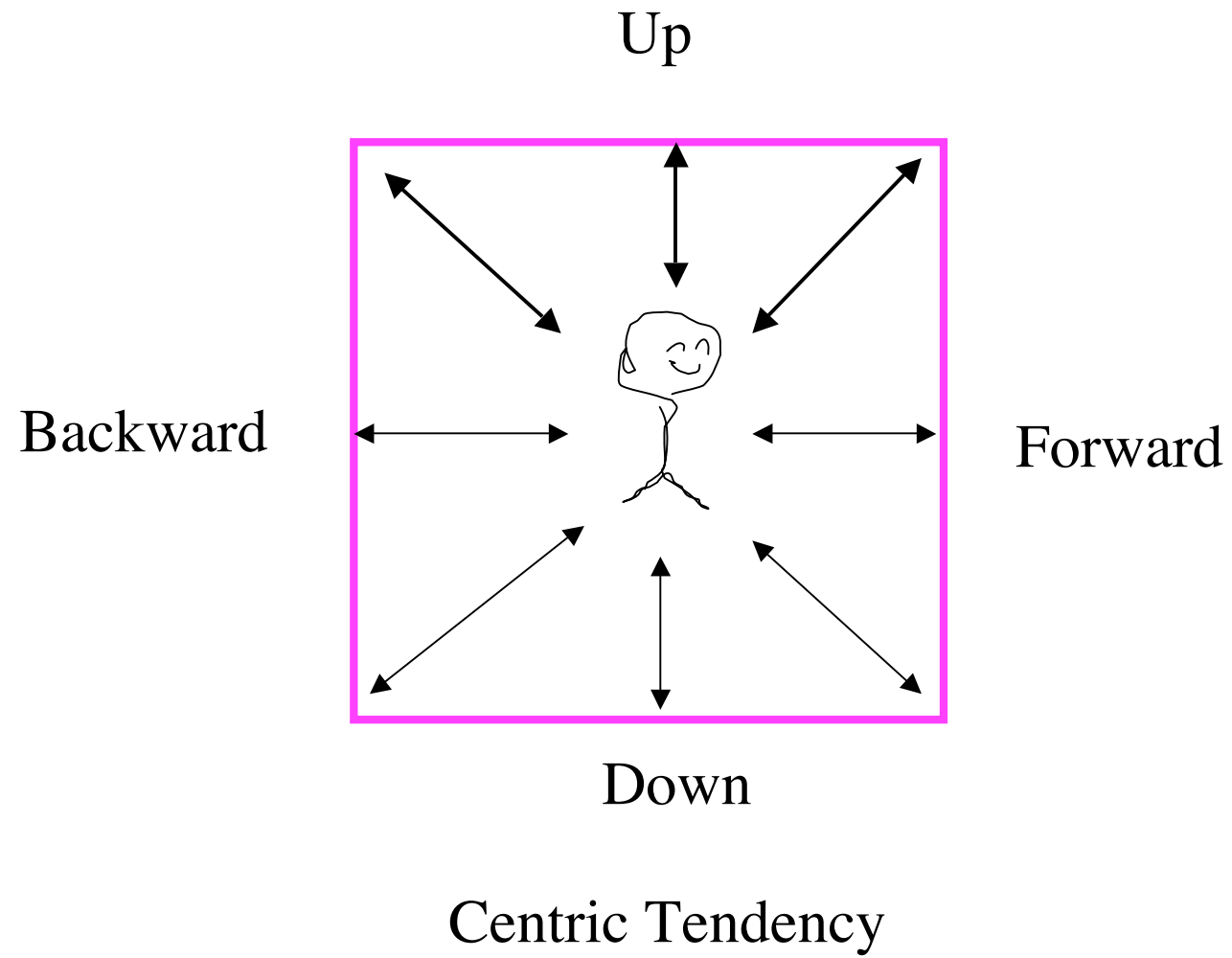
John Dewey, Art as Experience (1934)

I will begin exploring the up and down, to and fro, of our being situated in the world with Arnheim's notion of the centric tendency.

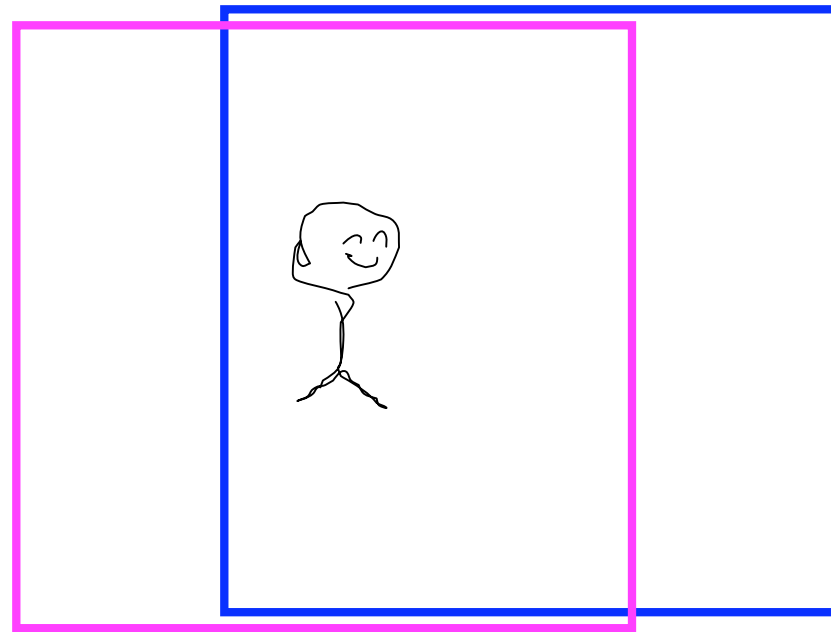


Centric





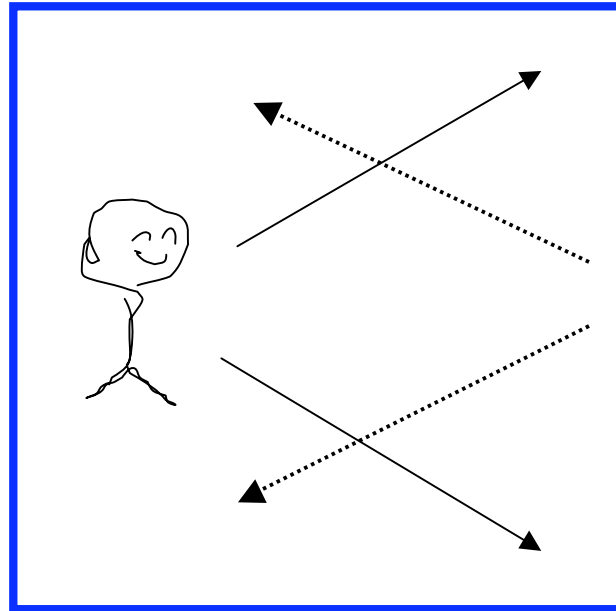
Now, I will show us breaking out of our shell of centric understanding by overlaying another center - the realization of an eccentric possibility- on the primary centric tendency.



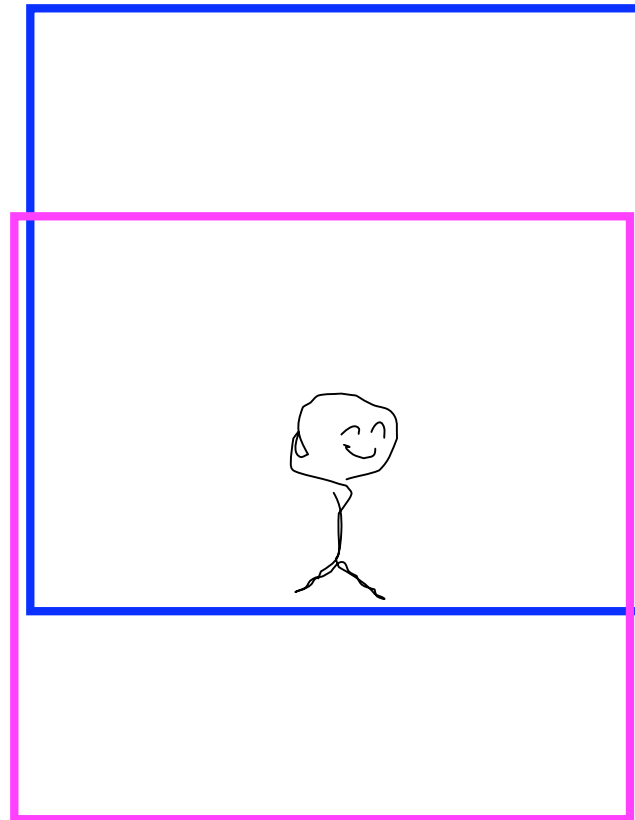
Centric

Eccentric

But, as in a gestalt perception, we only “live in” one center at a time, and we always resolve the dual centers as one. We either live in a centric frame or an eccentric frame. It is either a rabbit or a duck. We can move back and forth quite readily, but we can only resolve the competing meanings one way at a time.



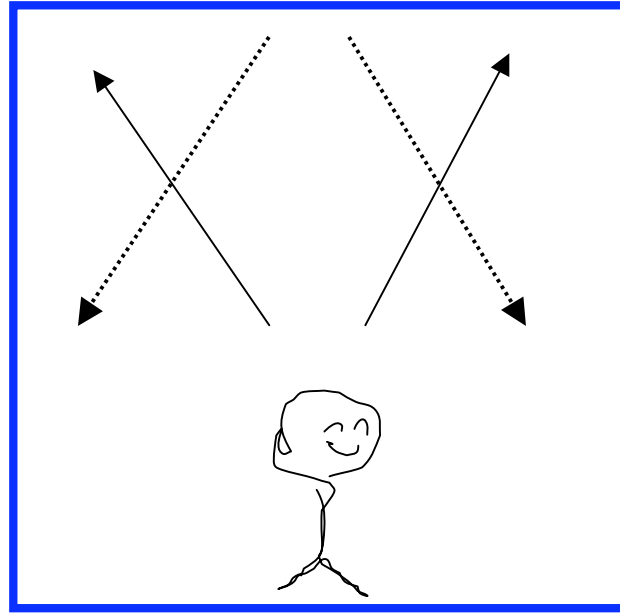
Eccentric:  
Forward  
Future  
Horizon  
Possibility  
Openness



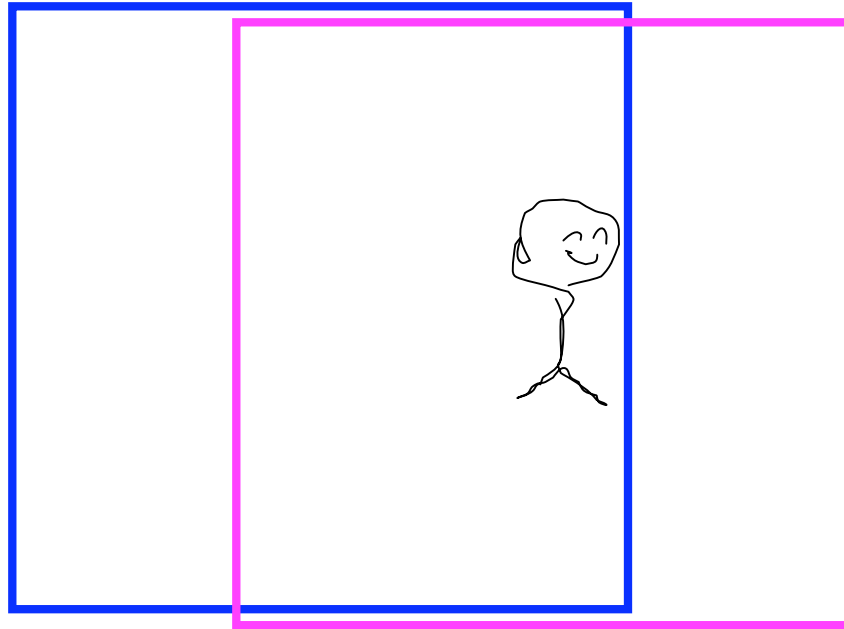
Eccentric

Centric

Eccentric: Up, Transcendent, Abstract, Aspiration



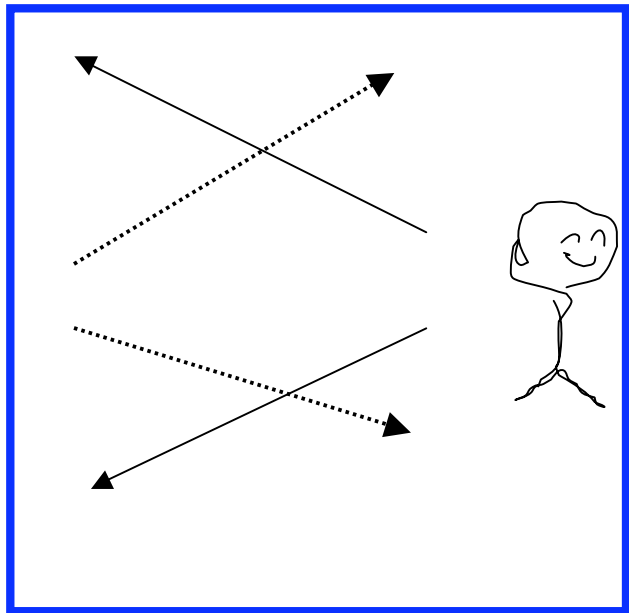
Eccentric



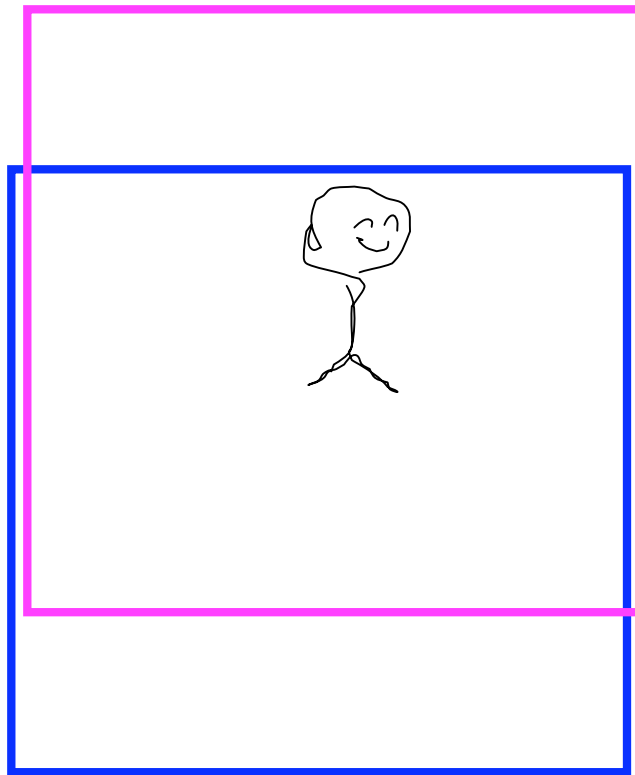
Centric



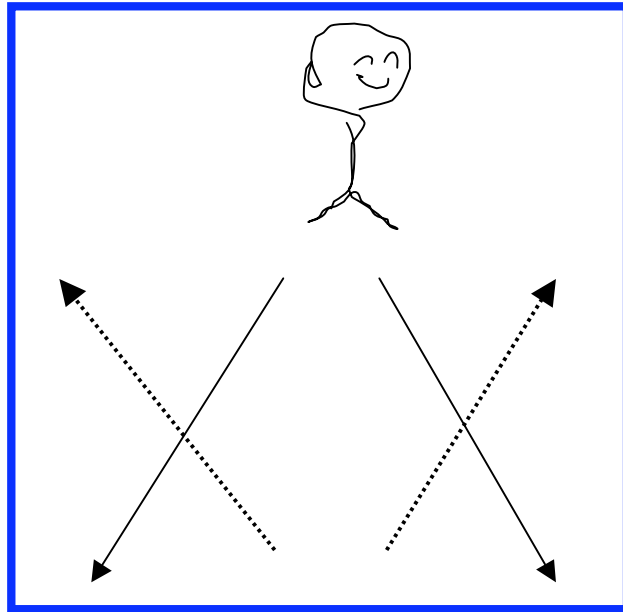
Eccentric:  
Past  
History  
Legacy  
Culture  
Origin  
Tradition



Centric



Eccentric

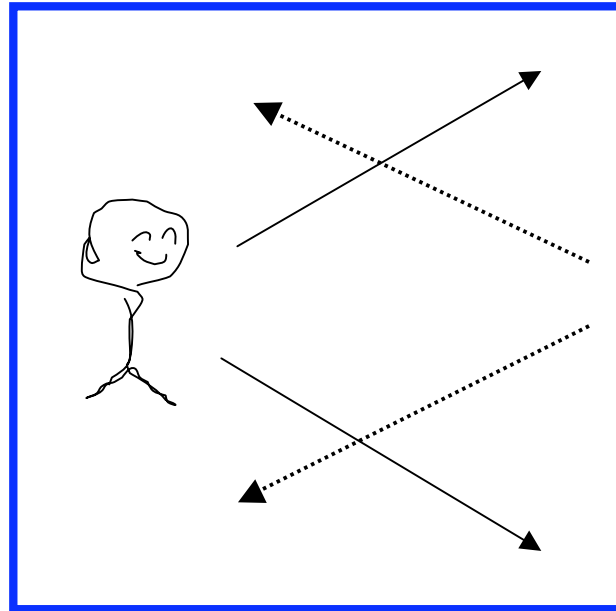


Eccentric: Down, Ground, Roots, Foundation,

“... the interaction of centricity and eccentricity directly reflected the two fold task of human beings, namely, the spread of action from the generating core of the self and the interaction with other such centers in the social field. The task in life of trying to find the proper ratio between the demands of the self and needs of outer entities was also the task of composition.”

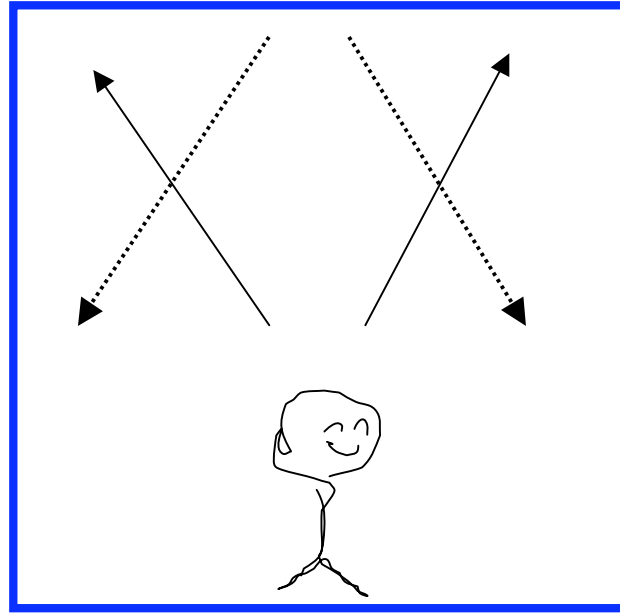
Rudolph Arnheim, The Power of the Center

Now, let us revisit each of the four eccentric fields, and try to read what they evoke “between the demands of the self and needs of outer entities”.

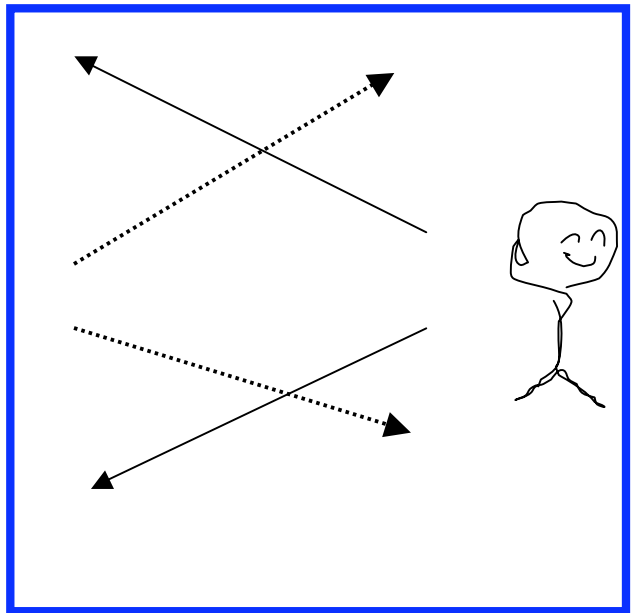


Eccentric:  
Forward  
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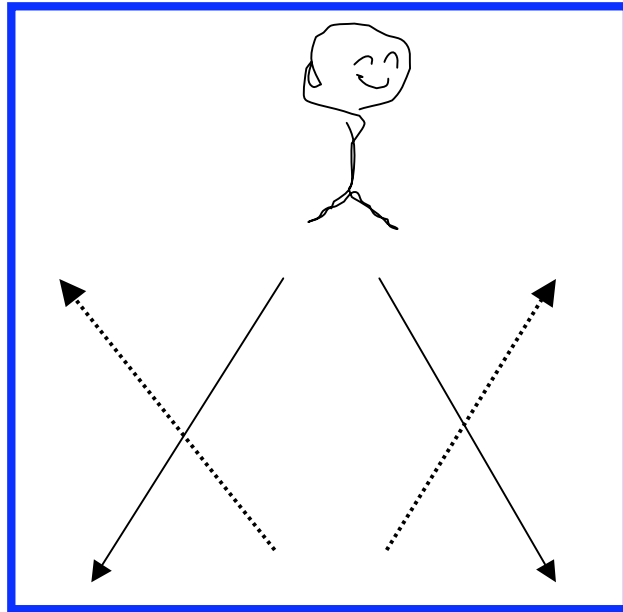
Eccentric: Up, Transcendent, Abstract, Aspiration



Eccentric:  
Past  
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Eccentric: Down, Ground, Roots, Foundation,

# Conclusion and Discussion