

The Architectural Diagram

Diagrams can be activators that help trigger constructions that are neither objective or subjective, neither before theory nor after theory, neither conceptual or opportunist, the location of the diagram is in the inter-subjective, durational and operational field where meanings are formed and transformed interactively. “The diagram works to blur the relationship between the desiring subject – the design, the user – and the desired object in order to move both subject and object towards an unmotivated condition,” (Eisenman, 211). “The essence of the diagrammatic technique is that it introduces into a work qualities that are unspoken, disconnected from ideal or an ideology, random, intuitive, subjective, not bound to linear logic – qualities that can be physical, structural, spatial or technical,” (Bos & Berkel, 224).

The Architectural Diagram as Abstract Machine

From Agamben’s *What is an Apparatus*, we find that, “an apparatus is a heterogeneous set that includes virtually anything, linguistic and nonlinguistic, under the same heading: discourses, institutions, buildings, laws, police measures, philosophical propositions, and so on, the apparatus itself is the network that is established between these elements,” (Agamben, 2-3). The apparatus has always had a concrete strategic function, located in a power relation, and appears at the intersection of power relations and relations of knowledge. “According to Agamben, “it would probably not be wrong to define the extreme phase of capitalist development in which we live as a massive accumulation and proliferation of apparatuses,” (Agamben, 15). Derrida seeks to find a way to dismantle apparatuses. In doing so, he develops a form of semiotic analysis known as deconstruction. Deconstruction for Derrida means that there is nothing outside of the text. That is to say, all of the references used to interpret a text are themselves texts, including the “text” of reality, as a reader knows it. There is no true objective, non-textual reference from which interpretation can begin. Deconstruction, then, can be described as an effort to understand a text through its relationships to various contexts. Throughout Derrida’s work, he writes from a place that is anti-form, anti-hierarchy, and anti-structure. Derrida writes that difference is designated as the movement according to which language, any code, or any system of referral in general is constituted historically as a weave of differences. From Agamben’s critique on capitalism as an apparatus, and Derrida’s theory on de-constructing the apparatus through

considering ideology as a set of signs and signifiers, we see a connection to De Certeau when he says that places and cities are saturated with signification, and are reduced to this signification. This is important when considering the narratives of a city for a culture with Derrida's ideas of difference in mind.

Going back to Agamben, while reading his article *What is a People?*, we find the essence of Derrida's writings on difference, as well as Certeau's ideas of the city. Agamben says that the interpretation of the political meaning of the term people is the fact that in modern European languages, this term always indicates the poor, the underprivileged, and the excluded. "This also means, however, that the constitution of the human species into a body politic comes into being through a fundamental split and that in the concept of people we can easily recognize the conceptual pair identified earlier as the defining category of the original political structure: naked life (people) and political existence (People), exclusion and inclusion," (Agamben, 31). "It is what always already is, as well as what has yet to be realized; it is the pure source of identity and yet it has to redefine and purify itself continuously according to exclusion, language, blood, and territory," (Agamben, 31). "And today, in a different and yet analogous way, the capitalistic democratic plan to eliminate the poor not only reproduces inside itself the people of the excluded but also turns all the populations of the Third World into naked life," (Agamben, 34).

Connecting this with architectural thought, Charles Jencks says, "identity must be recognized and honored, along with universal values," (Jencks, 53). "Since post-modern communication was simultaneously putting them in touch and flattening differences, the large world cities were becoming much more homogenous," (Jencks, 53). "Thus it became morally compelling to nurture plurality," (Jencks, 54). "Time is the architect – a nation is the builder, the simulation of this process became a goal of Post-Modern architects in the late 1980s, the instant building of difference in the city," (Jencks, 117). "In short, they lost the public discussion of what various icons should represent, and this fiasco or lacuna is, of course, part of the story how Post-Modernism came into being as a response to failures; or the parable with which I started this book, the difficulties of celebrating whisky, airplane, and soap monopolies," (Jencks, 213). "Hence the narrative continues today in all its ambivalence, as architects struggle to find more important content to signify than shopping, better commissions than commercial ones," (Jencks, 213). "While major architects fight it out to design the most striking

shapes, they also compete to design the most local contextual counterpoint,” (Jencks, 245).

Using all this to more specifically look at the architectural diagram, Gilles Deleuze says, a diagram is no longer an auditory or visual archive, but a map, a cartography that is coextensive with the whole social field, and is an abstract machine. For Deleuze, in *A Thousand Plateaus*, smooth space and a nomadic lifestyle emphasizes an aimless life with no points of trajectory because when all fantasized projections of striated space are gone, only the immediate, natural world exists, free of the striation of conceptions of what is reality. Perpetualization of power occurs through repetition of Bourgeois ideas, projections of commodity fetishism, consumerism, materialism, and class power.

The state exists because its power operates through the striation of thought, which seems inherent in nature to those being striated if one does not question the nature of their reality. What thought gains from this is a gravity that it would never have on its own, a center that makes everything, including the state, appear to exist by its own efficacy or on its own sanction, and through this, the state gains a whole consensus in that only thought is capable of inventing the fiction of a state that is universal by right.

The less people take thought seriously, the less that one is aware that freedom is in thought, and the more they think in conformity with what the state wants. Thought can be smooth space, a force that destroys the symbols and its copies, the model and its reproductions, and every possibility of subordinating thought to a model of the state. Through this, one can denounce the central interiority of the state as a means of control – the control of speech, language, and its affects. The state gives thought a form of interiority, and thought gives that interiority a form of universality. With this, we find that all varieties of the “real” and the “true” find their place in a striated mental space, and the nomad rejects this image and does things differently. The architectural diagram can operate in the same way.

Bernard Tschumi’s multi-disciplinary approach to the diagram led to a new and critical conceptualization of architecture, in terms of its power to re-describe and superimpose multiple criteria of architecture such as the body, movement, event and narrative. Also important to Tschumi were relations between context, concept, and content in the possible future narratives of the city. The diagram for Tschumi is a graphic representation of a concept, and for Tschumi, there is not architecture without a concept.

Here, we find similarities with the art of Joseph Kosuth. The architecture component for Tschumi is located not in the “object” but in the idea or concept. The production of meaning or concepts is important to Tschumi, and concepts are best represented by diagrams due to their ability to operate as an abstract machine.

Ultimately, through his architectural diagrams, Tschumi is attempting to bypass the history of architecture and its values, ideologies, and clichés. Here we see an influence from Derrida as Tschumi tries to re-configure what the definition of what architecture is. In order to do this, Tschumi – through the diagram – explores, at the city scale, the information and combination between concept, content, and context.

According to Tschumi, you need to conceptualize this because these are not forms – they are very abstract and complex. The definition of the word ‘city’ has to do with a substantial amount of noise. When conceptualizing Derrida’s *différance*, it is important to use the means at hand in order to concurrently question the discipline and examine the signs and signifiers presenting the perception of the concept, as well as to work and be aware of working in a position that is both in and out of socially constructed centers and structures.

The Diagram as a Means for the Emancipation and Autonomy within the Discipline

Eisenman uses Derrida and the diagram for the emancipation and the creation of autonomy of the discipline. Influenced by Derrida, Peter Eisenman reveals the critical power of the diagram, focusing on the importance of the postmodern discourses of historicism, place, and the linguistic turn in architectural theory. To Eisenman, the importance of the architectural diagram is the differences in the way that the diagram signifies, instead of signifying the diagram. Eisenman is more concerned with how architect’s designs externally motivate architectural signs through their desires when they apply an artificial set of signifiers that move an architectural sign beyond its architecturally structuring or internal motivation. Diagrams work to separate or distance the architect from the design process, and blur the relationship between the object/place and the subject, moving toward an unmotivated condition – ostensibly, according to Eisenman, producing random relationships between form, function, and meaning.

Therefore, for Eisenman, if a diagram can write architecture or act as a writing, this writing could be something different from the column as having an explicit and external sign function, the idea of writing as a diagram is a means of potentially

overcoming the question the question of origin (speech) as well as the metaphysics of presence. Thus, by focusing on the presence of the diagram as the primary condition, the diagram would be a means of reversing the motivated design process.

Here, we find the ideas of Deleuze, that free action resides within the smooth space or war machine, and that the opposite of this would be striated space or the repetition of the current state apparatus. The diagram works as a war machine to reverse the motivated design process (state apparatus).

This work is notable for the identification and investigation of apparatuses, together with the incessant attempts to find new ways to dismantle them. With this, Agamben presents the idea of contemporariness. The ones who call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity. Darkness is something that – more than light – turns directly singularly toward them. With this, Agamben asserts that the contemporary allows himself or herself to see outside of societal and social confines, and to maintain a psychic automatism. Additionally, Agamben states that contemporariness does not take place in chronological time; it is something that working with chronological time urges passes and transforms it. With the contemporary's critical view, norms that inhibit the social body can be transformed. Those who coincide too well with the epoch, those who are perfectly tied to it in every respect, are not contemporaries, precisely because they do not manage to see it; they are not able to firmly hold their gaze on it.

Derrida calls using the provisional structure with the knowledge that it is not an absolute truth bricolage. The person who does this thinking is the bricoleur. The bricoleur is a handyman, uses things at hand to put them together. The bricoleur is making due with what he or she has, but is paying attention to the little pieces and how they fit together.

An example of a bricoleur is Joseph Kosuth. According to the Guggenheim online collection, during the formative stage in his work, Kosuth made the tautological nature of art explicit. Taking a critical step back, Kosuth resolved that art presupposes the existence of an aesthetic entity that fulfills the criteria of artness. With this criteria, as Marcel Duchamp had shown with his ready-mades, art could be deemed art by the declaring “this is a work of art.”

Kosuth used this linguistic approach to explore the social, political, cultural, and

economic contexts through which art is presented and thus defined. Investigating the discursive possibilities of art, Kosuth used language itself as his medium, and created a conceptual art where perception was replaced by intellectual provocation, and words replaced images or objects. Kosuth sought to demonstrate that the “art” component is not located in the object itself but rather in the idea or concept of the work. Kosuth’s art operated to critique the production of meaning, instead of merely representing meaning.

Through this, Kosuth was attempting to reveal that all ideas or concepts constructed are within cultures. While not working with found objects like Duchamp, but with found signifiers and signs, Kosuth could still be considered a bricoleur. Bricolage, as a philosophical endeavor, is to function within an inherited system that is incoherent with the person being aware of this. In a sense, the bricoleur is building with what is at hand, using the provisional structure with the knowledge that it is not an absolute truth. Everything is provisional in terms of class, history and politics. Discourses in circulation are themselves sites of power and the contest for power.

Surrealist concepts are resolutions to the problem of the lack of emancipation and autonomy in architecture as a discipline, and to the problems presented by Derrida’s ideas of deconstruction theory. Diagrams can be a mode of an emergence of not only *différance*, but also of a place for experiments in autonomy through the vehicle of Surrealist principles. For Benjamin, the Surrealists have discovered revolutionary forces in particular objects and everyday use. Most importantly, for histrionic or fanatical stress on the mysterious side of the mysterious takes us no further; we penetrate the mystery only to the degree that we recognize it in the everyday world, by virtue of a dialectical optic that perceives the everyday as impenetrable, the impenetrable as everyday.

The Representation of the Diagram

Evans’ concerns with the spatialities of everyday life share certain sympathies with de Certeau, who has also done much work on the radicality of the everyday. De Certeau speaks of space in terms of the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities. It is the polyvalent realities of architecture as a practice that Evans brings to our attention. The essay, *Translations from Drawing to Building* demonstrates a shift towards the study of drawing as a device for thinking and imagining.

“Architecture is discussed, explained, and identified almost entirely through its representations, and these representations are often treated as though they were the architecture itself,” (Rattenbury, 1). The culture of treating un-built, imaginary designs, as architecture is essential to the design process as taught and used in the Western world. Architecture itself (the buildings as much as the representations) can be considered a medium. The concepts and narratives of the diagram, as noted above, should be an emergence of difference, emancipation, and autonomy. Although, guidelines should be set in order to ensure an objective, contemporary (in an Agamben sense of the word), mode of abstraction. The ones who call themselves contemporary are only those who do not allow themselves to be blinded by the lights of the century, and so manage to get a glimpse of the shadows in those lights, of their intimate obscurity, (Agamben,). A contemporary diagram would be one that is outside of the societal and social confines of style and trend. It would exhibit no style or trend, just an aim for a clear design to display data, and while working within this absence, can exceed the barriers of what constitutes a diagram by working and arranging data freely and autonomously.

Tufte outlines appropriate guidelines for creating information design that is clear, but displays the most amount of data possible without becoming confusing. Tufte says that designers need to create for audiences that are assumed as intelligent, instead of dumbing down the information. Also, he writes that any non-data ink or decorative elements should be omitted, and that elements that are easily read by the human eye should be used, such as serif typefaces. Tufte writes that all graphics should be simplified as much as possible, and that colors should be muted with only small bursts of bright or dark colors in order to communicate quality, value, or hierarchy.

These guidelines provide a well-articulated argument for an objective approach to communication and information design. It lets us see that it is important to focus on presenting the information, and not just decoration. With this, I find that diagrams can be experimental in nature, data heavy, but also legible. To me, all of these elements are important in design when considering the theoretical, historical, and multi-disciplinary use of the architectural diagram.

Narrating the City with the Diagram

“Most buildings are related to some sort of narrative in some way, and narratives, the stories of places and people, are the raw material of everything we do,” (Alsop, 216).

In order to nurture plurality, design the most local contextual counterpoint, and truly allow the diagram to be an emergence of difference, architects need standards to research the city, as it is perceived to those whose identities are constructed by it. Defining, collecting, cataloging, and analyzing artifacts, using archival and secondary data in ethnographic research, and mapping spatial data, can gather information. “Artifacts become cultural when they acquire meaning or significance because of how they relate to history, behavior, practices, and the values and beliefs of the groups that produce and use them,” (LeCompte, 1). Artifacts evoke the identities, concepts, and values to which individuals and members of a culture adhere. “The enactment of social roles is enhanced by markers that people adopt and ‘put on’ to signify their identity and enhance their performance of a given role, these markers are referred to as an identity kit, which consists of and is expressed in types of clothing, jewelry, cosmetics, hair styles, **housing**, interior decorations, tools people use, the leisure activities and foods they prefer, their modes of movement, speech codes and styles,” (LeCompte, 9). Additionally, the purposeful set-up of a map from a community, in this example a tourist map in particular, can “reveal how the map might promote commodification of the local environment and history through critical analysis,” (LaCompte, 18).

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