On the becoming-indiscernible of the diagram in societies of control

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The 'Pioneer Plaque' diagram,
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A diagram is a technology for thinking that secures an understanding of not just the static relations between the components that compose an architectural or urban space, but more importantly, the dynamic movements and potential for transformation of local environments, including the behaviour and habits that emerge between environment and inhabitant. The deployment of diagrams in a design and/or consultancy process can operate to analyse a pre-existing situation, as well as to speculate on how a near future can be spatially predicted, managed, and even controlled. In other words, the diagram can be both critical and projective. Nevertheless, what tends to be assumed is that the diagram is predominantly a graphic tool and that for the most part it translates ideas immediately and unproblematically, securing a clear path between concrete context and abstract idea. Even when a shift in emphasis is undertaken from the diagram as legible graphic object to a diagrammatics understood as an ongoing and open process that enables the transformation of peoples, places, and things, what tends to be forgotten are the less visible, non-discursive, and affective deployments of the diagram. As Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault have demonstrated, a diagram is also a site of struggle pertaining to the distribution of power relations as a composition or decomposition of forces. It follows that a diagram, conceived as diagrammatic process, has political implications. This essay tracks a brief journey following the vicissitudes of the dynamic diagram as it has been taken up in the theory and practice of architecture from the 1990s onwards, and speculates on how far the diagram as diagrammatic process is wittingly and unwittingly used toward the management of contemporary societies of control. The becoming-indiscernible of the diagram in societies of control is the threshold beyond which the outlines of the human subject as project begins to dissipate, a moment of either terrifying dissolution, or else a point beyond which there might open new opportunities for other kinds of diagrams and other processes of subjectification.

1. The future of a diagram

Somewhere in outer space two diagrams float free both featuring, among other marks and signs, a male figure holding up an open hand in greeting, presumably to demonstrate that he grasps no lethal weapon, and a female figure with her weight shifted toward one leg, and her arms relaxed by her sides, the second sex in this Homo sapien, heteronormative couple. On 2nd March 1972, the space-craft Pioneer 10 was optimistically launched into outer space, set on a trajectory that would take it well beyond the solar system in which the planet Earth is located. A further space-craft, Pioneer II was subsequently launched just over a year later on 5th April 1973. These sibling space-craft shared a notable supplement to their star-dust resilient structures in the form of a plaque, generally referred to as the ‘Pioneer Plaque’. On these plaques was inscribed an identical diagram, the aim of which was to communicate a message from humankind to intelligent forms of life out there in the Great Outdoors. Given the significance of this message, conveying as it does the optimistic hope for some form of encounter with an erstwhile unimaginable Other, the content of the message had to be conveyed in the
most straightforward manner possible, with as little room for misinterpretation as possible. A diagram here is a carefully composed arrangement of lines etched into a resilient material surface, depicting a fundamental message that speaks of human form (as described in opening), scale, technology, and galactic location: that is, sufficient information to enable a return to sender. Leaving aside many obvious problems in this optimistic attempt at diagrammatic communication, such as, why the representative male and female Homo sapien couple depicted on the plaque are naked, what kind of perceptual apparatus the intelligent Other supposed to encounter and decipher this plaque is presumed to own, and the assumed beneficence of the unknown Other following such an unlikely encounter; instead, what is interesting is how the diagram attempts to work, what it takes its task to be, and how it assists in the imagination of unimaginable futures. Today, our present time stratum makes clear what could only be the obscurely felt future anticipated at the moment of the launch of this diagram into outer space. Back here on Earth we take part in a global milieu much altered by intervening world-historical events, we are the future of a diagram, and yet what do we make of the diagram and what it can do?

2. Vicissitudes of the dynamic diagram

A diagram is less a representation of a given state of affairs, or an illustration of a probable future, than a dynamic program orchestrating the projection of an unforeseeable event that promises to transform a situation. This definition of the diagram, or the diagrammatic, as a dynamic arrangement of forces, affects, and vectorial trajectories, holding the promise of unexpected, and novel worlds yet to come, was circulated in the mid to late 1990s during a period when the relay between theory and practice in architecture still placed an emphasis on importing its concepts from elsewhere. It was also a period during which concepts, once aired, were quickly deemed to be exhausted, and so in the wake of the publication of Ben van Berkel and Caroline Bos’s guest-edited edition of Any Magazine in 1998, entitled Diagram Work, it would seem that there was little more to say about the diagram, at least discursively. As though in preparation for a dynamic diagram thinking, in the previous year AD (Architectural Design) profile no. 127, Architecture After Geometry was published (Lynn, 1997), featuring Stan Allen’s influential, illustrated essay, ’From object to field’ (Allen, 1997), interesting here because of the way in which it too animated the work of the diagram, seemingly liberating architecture from its object fixation into a diagrammatic field, network or web of wild and unpredictable interactions. Allen, it should be noted, also contributed an essay to Bos and van Berkel’s Diagram Work, making his vested interest in diagrams explicit. To further stress this brief flurry of diagrammatic activity, the OASE Journal for Architecture published an edition in 1998 dedicated to diagrams, edited by Like Bijlsma, Udo Garritzmann, and Wouter Deen. All of this is not to say that diagrammatic practices came to a standstill after this fleeting moment of exuberance, but rather the creative actors in question chose to no longer discuss what it was they were in the midst of doing. This is of course somewhat of an over-simplification, generated more from the power of academic and architectural chatter, and how a traffic in concepts comes to be so easily denigrated (oh, but we already did the diagram in the ’90s!). Around the turn of the new millennium it would also seem that a wall was slowly erected before critical architectural theory, so that the relay between theory and practice was made less trafficable. This shift in the status of architectural theory was attended by both the digital turn, and the design research (or research ‘by design’) turn in architecture, and was no doubt the expression of a certain weariness in the face of discourse, which never seemed to get
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the job done. The woes of architectural theory are important to mention here, as the relay between theory and practice can also be described as a diagram of power, of which more below.

When Sarah Whiting and Robert Somol situated their diagram in contradistinction to the concept of the index in 2002, a few short years after the publication of Peter Eisenman’s *Diagram Diaries* (Eisenman, 1999), where an essay by Somol also notably appears (Somol, 1999), the job was effectively finished off. Whiting and Somol made the loud and clear call for a projective, post-critical architecture, and the killing off of their precursors. Early signs must have been evident of this imminent overthrow, as Eisenman was pre-emptively dismissing expressions of Oedipal anxiety already in his *Diagram Diaries* (Eisenman, 1999, p.29), an Oedipal anxiety also noted by Reinhold Martin from amidst the critical vs projective debate (Martin, 2005, p.2). The rise of projective architecture does not exactly spell out the death of theory (Frichot, 2009b), but suggests a theory repurposed, streamlined, perhaps made more diagrammatic, that is, future oriented. And from what key source did the dynamic diagram shared by the above architects and architectural thinkers issue, but from the philosophical writings of Gilles Deleuze, and also Deleuze with Félix Guattari, whose insistent presence is often found to be lurking in the footnotes where not expressly referred to in text.

This essay will track the rise of diagrammatic thinking through the last years of the last millennium, with an emphasis on what can be called the dynamic diagram, and how after a flurry of interest, engagements with diagrammatics receded, much at the same pace that explicit engagements with the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari withdrew within the discipline of architecture. From the dynamic diagram, which promises the emergence of new, even quasi-utopian worlds, toward a consideration of diagrams of power as they develop between the work of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, I will speculate on how far the diagram is the technology that surpasses the human form toward posthuman landscapes and things, or how technology not only makes society durable, as Bruno Latour has claimed (Latour, 1991), but discovers the means to make (human) social relations redundant. This may turn out to be an ill-advanced speculation on the other side of the Great Outdoors, where material infrastructures and nonhuman actors will persist without their human companions, and nobody will weep.

3. From object to field and the diagrams that matter

Stan Allen’s essay ‘From object to field’ (Allen, 1997) actually uses the term ‘model’ rather than ‘diagram’, but offers a crucial addition to this story of the abrupt appearance of diagram thinking in the late 1990s as it demonstrates through both graphic diagram and text a shift from a near fetishistic object fixation and emphasis on permanence and durability in architecture, to the dynamics of field conditions and only provisionally stable situations. The field is the dynamic context within which we should never forget that our precious objects, architectural artefacts, are inevitably lodged and subsequently altered. Allen introduces the term ‘emergence’, that is, the now well-established notion of self-organisation or the bottom-up (as distinct from top-down) local interactions between cells that produce a global pattern or the appearance of order at a larger scale: flocks of birds, ant nests, cities, brains, and the usual list of phenomena. Emergence is a term that would gain wide-spread popularity through the 2000s, and the influence of the AD edition of *Architecture After Geometry* (1997) where Allen’s essay appears, may be indicated in the price tag that Amazon has placed on an original, unused copy: US$1942.65. Although Allen does not use the term ‘diagram’ in this well-known essay, in his contribution to Bos and van Berkel’s *Diagram Work* he expressly locates

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his discussion under the title ‘Diagrams matter’, placing his debt to Deleuze and Guattari squarely up-front with an opening quote pertaining to the diagrammatics of abstract machines in *A Thousand Plateaus*. The dynamics of field conditions becomes the Deleuzo-Guattarian ‘matter movement’, ‘matter energy’, ‘matter flow’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.407) that challenges fixed form; how the diagram develops (rather than simply analyses or makes an account of) ‘momentary clusters of matter in space, subject to continual modification’ (Allen, 1998, p.16). Allen argues that the ‘practice of architecture today is measured by its performative effects as much as by its durable presence’ (*ibid.*) and that the dynamism of information and images have overtaken any ideal of permanence in architecture. Allen’s various interests concerning: emergence or transformative field conditions; an emphasis on the behaviour or performance of matter counterposed to mute matter passively manipulated through the imposition of a predefined form, that is, hylomorphically organised matter; the importance of local encounters and actions; the fact that diagrams do not have to resemble what they produce, and that this non-linear relation is not a problem, that is, diagrams are non-representative because they are operational, all of these inclinations gain in relevance within and beyond architecture over subsequent years especially with the wholesale shift into digital and practice-based research. In Allen’s essay ‘Diagrams matter’ (Allen, 1998) there is only a quiet intimation of a future where ‘stealth diagrams’ or computational diagrams come to ubiquitously facilitate the circulation of power relations amidst social assemblages. The intimation of the relation between diagrams and power intervenes as a moment of hesitation before Allen moves on to the more optimistic potential he sees in architectural approaches to diagram work, and the promises of materiality ‘after-theory’, obliquely suggested less in his text than in the buzz words that frame the page space in this edition of *Any Magazine*. Lingering behind Allen’s optimism is the non-visible means by which information technologies increasingly exert control, as well as an allusion to the exhaustion of media discussed fleetingly in reference to the early media theorist Friedrich Kittler (*ibid.*, p.19). What is left untouched is the question of whether the diagram is a medium and a concept that can also be exhausted. Instead these subterranean concerns yield to the force of projective architectural optimism, that is to say an emphasis on the work and works of architecture.

4. Diagram work, work, work

The late 1990s was still a period within which experimental architectural studios such as UN Studio were dabbling as much in discourse as in practice, enabling the relay between theory and practice to impact both on shifts in practice, as well as transformations of the constellations of concepts that could be used to critically develop discourse, and in turn affect practice all over again. The starting point was both-and, theory and practice, and the relay was mobile. By the mid-2000s one side of the relay would come to be emphasised, as practice-based research in architecture came to prominence. Caroline Bos and Ben van Berkel of UN Studio became the guest-editors of *Diagram Work*, the 23rd magazine of a total of 28 featured in the *Any Magazine* series, overseen by Cynthia C. Davidson from a corner of Peter Eisenman’s office in New York. In Mark Garcia’s ambitious 2010 edited collection *The Diagrams of Architecture*, he makes a point of acknowledging Eisenman as a leading authority in the field of (architectural) diagrams (Garcia, 2010, p.38), including not one but two essays by Eisenman, both republished from Eisenman’s *Diagram Diaries* (Eisenman, 1999). The question of who is the authority is very much a question of power in this diagram I am incrementally presenting in a partial and fragmentary manner, of the vicissitudes of the dynamic diagram in architectural history and theory.
I will not offer an account of Bos and van Berkel’s introduction to *Diagram Work*, which I have discussed elsewhere (Frichot, 2011), except to draw attention to their claim that diagrams are processual, and offer liberatory potentials for architecture, as diagrams provide unlimited ways of engaging in the materials of worlds. The diagram, to introduce a term that will follow in the footsteps of these discussions, is ‘projective’, and that is its promise. Like a projectile, it is launched into a future and promises novel returns to the experimental architect. One further point that needs to be mentioned here is the theoretical means by which Bos and van Berkel situate their dynamic diagram, and that is by way of Deleuze and Guattari (see also De Landa 1998). They explain in some detail that the diagram can be defined in three directions: 1.) by way of Deleuze’s discussion of the preparatory processes through which Francis Bacon composed his canvases (Deleuze, 2003); 2.) through Deleuze’s discussion of the systems of signs circulating within the novels of Marcel Proust; and 3.), importantly, in relation to the conceptual conversation that is worked out between Deleuze and Foucault. Behind these three diagrams there also persists the powerful and perplexing concept of the diagram as ‘abstract machine’, a concept famously coined by Deleuze and Guattari. Bos and van Berkel’s reading is subsequently reiterated in a straightforward recapitulation in Mark Garcia’s introduction to *The Diagrams of Architecture*, where Garcia likewise suggests that the diagram work of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, is articulated by three concepts influenced respectively by Bacon, Proust and Foucault (Garcia, 2010, p.23-24). That is to say, an unproblematic diagrammatic transfer is achieved, though Garcia does place an emphasis on the influence of the Deleuze-Foucault assemblage.

5. Anti-indexical diagrammatic projections
The dynamic potential of diagrammatics is taken up by Sarah Whiting and Robert Somol and transformed into a projective architecture with the aim of providing a way out of the discursive ramblings and infinite deferrals that the writers ascribe to critical architecture. In addition, projective architecture can be seen to serve as an implicit rallying call to the design practice turn. In their influential essay, ‘Notes around the doppler effect and other moods of modernism’ (2002), where Whiting and Somol mine the autonomy of architecture, the diagram is situated in opposition to the index. One of the precursors they notably aim to overturn through their performance of this opposition is the architect Peter Eisenman. Following their account, Eisenman’s critical analyses of architecture places too much emphasis on the traces of an (architectural) event, the indices of architecture’s mode of production and design process, and the issue that (architectural) objects point toward continual transformation (Whiting and Somol, 2002, p.74). All of these interests are purportedly practised through strategies of serial reproduction (via diagrams too tied up with indexicality), that are caught up in a fixation on representation and narrative, and perpetuated through an infinite deferral of meaning, which Whiting and Somol identify as the symptoms of critical architecture. They argue that the cure is to manifest a shift from disciplinarity as autonomy and process to disciplinarity as force and effect (ibid., p.75). The diagram vs the index in this instance acknowledges a debt, yet again, to the Deleuze-Foucault assemblage, wherein the diagram, and here Whiting and Somol cite Deleuze ‘imposes a particular form of conduct on a particular multiplicity’ (Whiting and Somol, 2002, p.75; Deleuze, 1988, p.34); that is to say, the exemplary diagram of Bentham’s utilitarian panopticon, as discussed in Michel Foucault’s * Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1977). This lodges the diagram in disciplinary societies, where conduct is imposed through the distribution of space and the serialisation of time, leaving aside the issue of emerging societies of control, which is where De-
leuze wants to get to when he reads Foucault.

6. Eisenman diagram diaries indexed
Despite the retrospective collection of projects documented in *Diagram Diaries*, and notably introduced by Somol, the index as concept owns the signature of Eisenman, who appropriates it from C. S. Pierce. This association of Eisenman with the index is of course only further entrenched in Whiting and Somol’s essay, discussed above, locating Eisenman less on the side of the diagram than on the side of the indexical. Commencing with the title itself, all manner of obfuscations are at work in *Diagram Diaries*, which, as diaries, thereby attest to a personal history of the deployment of methods and theories across the development of a well-known architectural practice signed Peter Eisenman. Following Somol’s introductory essay, Eisenman then presents his own account, which travels through a history of diagrams that is as long as the history of the discipline of architecture itself, and which then proceeds to take issue with Somol’s definition of the diagram; the Deleuzian diagram of unformed matters and flows. Deleuzian diagrammatics is dispensed with in exchange for the mystic writing pad that Jacques Derrida borrows from Sigmund Freud, offering Eisenman a complex multilayered surface suffuse with traces that look backwards (anteriority of architecture, the persisting presence of our precursors) and forwards ((re)generative, transformative) (Eisenman, 1999, p.33). This is a recapitulation of Eisenman’s opening definition of the diagram, whereby ‘In architecture the diagram is understood historically in two ways: as an explanatory or analytical device and as a generative device’ (*ibid.*, p.94). Eisenman argues that ‘The diagram acts as an agency which focuses the relationship between an authorial subject, an architectural object, and a receiving subject’ (*ibid.*, p.35). Further, the diagram will not operate without an input from a subject. Another way of putting this is that the diagram, as object, is fully correlated to a (human) subject.

While elsewhere I have suggested that Eisenman’s account of his own work depends on a reading of Deleuze’s diagram, so engaging in a contemporary traffic of ideas that is momentarily enthralled by a dynamic diagrammatics, this overlooks the problem of the originary locale of presence toward which Eisenman leads his reader (Frichot, 2011). Eisenman’s opening essay, ‘Diagram: An original scene of writing’ seeks to redefine the diagram as a form of writing, or a Derridean trace marked through the layers of a child’s play thing in the form of a mystic writing pad: plastic stylus, translucent waxy sheet, and dark waxy under-sheet where a history of traces collects, making the surface murky with a confounding palimpsest of lines: the unconscious, the location from which the repressed diagram threatens to return. Eisenman conceptually circles through Deleuze, mostly to distinguish himself from Somol’s conceptual labour in the introduction, then through Foucault, only to return to an earlier influence on his work, Derrida. Almost inevitably this produces a kind of collapse of layers of a contemporary history of ideas imported from outside the discipline, which are paradoxically redeployed to shore up the autonomy of architecture. The central architectural concerns that Somol’s dynamic and unstable Deleuzian diagram misses, according to Eisenman, include: architecture’s struggle with metaphysical presence; architecture as motivated sign; and the desiring subject’s attachment to architecture as place or ground. These three concerns are what define the discipline, and the diagrams of Deleuze, by contrast, prove to be highly undisciplined with respect to the work that needs to be done. The diagram Eisenman prefers attempts to reveal the latencies of architecture’s disciplinary formation, and provides an index to both what has come before, and what will one day emerge.
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7. Return of the repressed of diagram thinking

AD (Architectural Design), the ALDI of architectural discourse on contemporary practice has developed a series of ‘readers’ to complement its popular AD magazines. In 2010 Mark Garcia’s edited volume, The Diagrams of Architecture, appeared in this series, a little over 10 years after the flurry of activity I have described around dynamic diagrams, presumably enabling enough of a backwards glance that a retrospective prognosis could be applied. Eleven of the 25 essays are republished (many from sources already noted above), and Garcia book-ends the whole with an introduction and a future-oriented epilogue. When a theme or theoretical framework appears in AD, what is produced is a saturation of the marketplace of ideas such that an idea once featured here, easily accessible, easy to read, produced under a recognisable brand name, is rendered effectively and immediately obsolete. One result is the exhaustion of architectural theory, or at least the exhaustion of the circulation of certain key concepts. There is a curious moment, a noticeable point of tension in Garcia’s epilogue where the neoliberal capitalist marketplace of the diagram comes to sit alongside a futurology of the diagram, even a quasi-utopian imagining. This direction toward which the diagrams of architecture lead is pre-empted in an essay by Charles Jencks (2010), located within the section of the reader that is called epilogue, and just prior to Garcia’s own epilogue. Jencks directly addresses the issue of diagrams and utopian imaginations, and also includes his own well-known diagrams, which map theoretical paradigms and ‘isms’ across a chart that appears to be a bubble diagram deflated, stretched, and distorted by spatio-temporal drag. Jenck’s diagrams are compelling, if somewhat overwhelming, as they attempt to exhaustively map a history of thought that pertains to architecture. Returning to Garcia’s own epilogue, following after Jencks, it is hard not to read the connection that Garcia is forging between shifts in neoliberal capitalist market forces and how diagrams contribute to these by enabling a form of utopian thinking: the future could be brighter, if only... He writes, ‘[a]cademic departments, research centres, courses, organisations, institutions, consultancies and offices that specialise in diagrams and their design will emerge to exploit this new global opportunity and market’ (Garcia, 2010, p.312) and despite anti-diagrammatic and even dystopian arguments the ‘field will be more oriented toward the future’ (ibid.), recognising the potential of ‘futurological utopian powers’ (ibid.).

In fact Garcia, as well as lecturing in the School of Architecture, Greenwich University, UK, is a senior consultant at Think & Sell, where design thinking promises to ‘achieve the satisfaction of people’ and the ‘efficient achievement of business outcomes’, by applying such methods as branding, consulting, and social media². After all, it is the advertising gurus, business people and design consultants who have meanwhile claimed ownership of the concept, because ‘concepts can be sold’ in our societies of control (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994, p.10). Deleuze and Guattari, as I will discuss below, seek instead to resist the global capitalist drift whereby concepts become commercial products.

8. Interlude on idiots, idioms and ideograms

The idiot emerges as a powerful figure in the writings of Isabelle Stengers (2005) and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994, p.62, 63). The definition of an idiot, as Stengers explains, originally applied to the stranger or outsider who did not speak the Greek language and who was effectively cut off from the civilised community of antiquity on account of not sharing their means of communication. Idiot here is related to the word idiom, which describes a semi-private language, and the power relations at work assume that one linguistic domain dominates over another, the idiom being the minor not the major or dominant language in a given context. Never-

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theless, there is a paradoxical power that can be secured in this position, because the idiot is the one who ‘resists the consensual way in which the situation is understood’ (Stengers, 2005, p.994), and thereby disrupts the smooth passage of non-critical agreement. Importantly, and this is Stenger’s key point: ‘the idiot demands that we slow down, that we don’t consider ourselves authorised to believe we possess the meaning of what we know’ (ibid., p.995). The idiot disrupts power relations where they concern knowledge, as well as the institutional arrangements through which permission is granted pertaining to who is allowed to know what and how much, and therefore who is qualified to speak. There are always risks: the diagram can also manifest as a colonising power, such that what began as an idiom gradually takes hold and becomes the dominant language. The diagram has a capacity to be disseminated as a kind of idiom, known to a select few who have come for various reasons to gather in a specific place or around a shared matter of concern. As Garcia argues, an ability to construct diagrams (as a conventional system of architectural notation) has been historically associated with architectural skill and knowledge, and how the discipline and the profession secures its expertise and its institutional and disciplinary identity (Garcia, 2010, p.19). The diagram as idiom holds the power to both exclude and to revivify a discipline, its message can either clarify or further obscure what is at stake, but the one who holds the key to the diagram usually situates themselves (even if only for the meantime) in a significant if ambivalent node of power.

Garcia includes in his collection a newly commissioned essay by Leon van Schaik (2010) where a quasi-phenomenological ‘natural history’ of the use of the ideogram is offered as a located, personological interpretation, or rather an attempt to displace diagram work for his preferred narrative method of the ideogram. A phenomenological account of diagrams is one that Garcia suggests has been formerly overlooked in discussions of architectural diagrams, and the inclusion of Schaik’s essay is supposed to redress this issue (Garcia, 2010). The ideograms presented run adjacent to the rise of practice-based research in the context of Melbourne, Australia, and are, as such, locally familiar in that context, which has meanwhile produced some impact in a few schools in Europe still struggling to find ways to administer research by design. Schaik’s diagrams, or ideograms, produce sites of considerable perplexity as each example requires a wealth of explanatory support, manifesting less as a communication device than as a site for further discussion. In many ways these ideograms have some relation to the index, as discussed by Whiting and Somol, for they point at something, but infinitely defer signification. They are overloaded with floating signifiers that are highly suggestive of the mise en scene of the theatre, including the recurring motifs of the proscenium arch, theatrical wings, and silhouettes of masculine faces impassively looking onto the action. Schaik explains that these illustrative props make reference to the theatre of memory. Like Eisenman, he is interested in mnemonic devices and addressing the desiring subject (Eisenman, 2010, p.32), though for Schaik this subject is deeply phenomenological, while for Eisenman, some escape is sought from the self-same desiring subject. More often than not exacerbating explanation, these ideograms also rely on the willing compliance of the initiated: in effect they produce their own private idiom (see Blythe and Schaik, 2013). As ideograms they still perform as diagrams in so far as they ‘impose[s] a particular form of conduct on a particular multiplicity’ (Deleuze, 1988, p.34). They do this by challenging the where-with-all of their receivers to undertake the complex diagnostics required in order to get at the obtuse narrative backstories hidden behind the ‘sensuously laden’ curtains (Schaik, 2010, p.108) and wings that populate their scenes, as though
to suggest all manner of back-stage shenanigans. Despite their diagrammatic obscurity, and the fact that they operate more as reflective, or even instructional illustrations than projective imaginings, they remain diagrammatic in that their force pertains to the distribution of relations of power in the disciplining of the emergence of an idiosyncratic approach to design practice research. The power of such new formations of architectural knowledge should not be underestimated, and should not be exempt from critical interrogation.

9. Diagrammatics for dummies, or contemporary architecture
What is a ‘dummy text’ as cipher to the location of the diagrammatic condition of contemporary architecture? It is the chore that Somol (1999) appears to give himself in his essay ‘Dummy text, or the diagrammatic basis of contemporary architecture’ in order to pursue the emergence of another world (of architecture). Is the diagram a kind of crash-text-dummy, sent forth as an emissary to check the durability and liveability of a future people, of what is to come? Rather than desiring subjects fixated on desirable architecture-objects, Somol alludes to a shift toward posthuman subjects, or at least a challenge to the architect’s presumed authority when he argues that:

’a diagrammatic practice (flowing around obstacles yet resisting nothing) multiplies signifying processes (technological as well as linguistic) within a plenum of matter, recognizing signs as complicit in the construction of specific social machines. The role of the architect in this model is dissipated, as he or she becomes an organiser and channeller of information’ (Somol, 1999, p.24).

This leads not only to the promise of new social formations, but to new matters and their diverse ecologies and multiplicities, and it is true that what will soon follow is a flourishing of publications addressed to new materialism (Coole and Frost, 2010; van der Tuinen and Dolphijn, 2012) and vibrant matter, or thing-power (Bennett, 2010), and a non-representational theory (Thrift, 2008) that Somol would have benefited from (had he been addressing this theme later) in order to unpack how the diagram operates as a ‘post-representational device’ between text and form (Somol, 1999, p.8). This is the future of the dynamic diagram, an inking of the emergence of another world as catastrophic happening, including a fuller apprehension of society as a ‘plastic entity, susceptible to multiple (virtual) diagrams and possibilities of arrangement’ (ibid., p.23). All of which begins to sound very much like the shift from Foucault’s disciplinary societies to Deleuze’s societies of control, where modifications of segments (of language, labour and life) are superseded by perpetual modulations.

10. The stirrup, the steppes, the marauding tribes, and the Great Outdoors
Following Foucault’s account of power relations, Deleuze offers a valuable characterisation that leads to four different, yet interlocking definitions of the diagram. He commences with a series of questions. What is power? It is a relation between forces that moves from point to point across a field of forces (much as Stan Allen has described with respect to field conditions). How is it practised? By way of the circulation of effects, as force affects other forces, resulting in either active or reactive (passive) effects: to incite (active) or to be incited (reactive); to produce (active) or to be induced to produce (reactive), and while it is tempting to place value judgments on these compositions of force, every force is contingently open such that at one moment it activates a situation, and in the next it is acted upon. That is to say, every force ‘has the power to affect (others) and to be affected (by others again)…Spontaneity and receptivity now take on a new meaning: to affect or to be affected’ (Deleuze, 1988, p.70-71). The four definitions of the diagram...
of power that follow include: 1.) the presentation of the relation of forces, particular to a milieu or situation; 2.) the distribution of power to affect, and to be affected; 3.) the mixing of non-formalised functions and unformed pure matter; and 4.) the transmission or distribution of particular features (ibid., p.72-73).

These four definitions determine that the diagram constitutes strategies, and what is curious is that no graphic formulation necessarily attends this diagram, notably, diagrams ‘evade all stable forms of the visible and the articulable’ (ibid., p.52), visibilities and statements, things and words, being the two poles of knowledge, though we should be wary of ascribing these poles to either linguistics or to phenomenology. While these four definitions offer some guidance, Deleuze also explains that there are as many diagrams as there are social fields, and that every diagram is a spatio-temporal multiplicity relating matter and forces. Diagrams are unstable, fluid ‘continually churning up matter and functions in a way likely to produce change’ (ibid., p.35), and the diagram ‘never functions in order to represent a persisting world but produces a new type of reality, a new model of truth’ (ibid.).

Deleuze characterises the diagram as a distribution of power relations or forces both in his collaboration with Félix Guattari in A Thousand Plateaus, and where he writes on Michel Foucault. The diagram becomes a powerful enabling conduit in what Deleuze and Guattari call an assemblage (agencement), and what Foucault calls an apparatus ( dispositif): assemblage, abstract machine, machinic assemblage, diagram, these are all concepts that seem to be used interchangeably in the Deleuzian lexicon; nevertheless, it is better to be wary of conceptually collapsing them. A man-animal-weapon assemblage, such as discovered in nomadic tribes is offered as an exemplary dynamic diagram (of forces) (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.404). Importantly, the tool and the weapon embedded in complex relations of power are not causes (of industrial revolutions or great wars), but consequences erupting from complex assemblages that relate all manner of human and nonhuman things. The question of what an assemblage becomes or what it produces is of less relevance than what it does, and how it does it, and this how pertains to diagrammatics. Actors, including technologies, concepts, things, humans and environments, are all bound together as ‘machinic assemblages’:

‘The stirrup, in turn, occasioned a new figure of the man-horse assemblage, entailing a new type of lance and new weapons; and this man-horse-stirrup constellation is itself variable, and has different effects depending on whether it is bound up with the general conditions of nomadism, or later readapted to the sedentary conditions of feudalism. The situation is exactly the same for the tool: once again, everything depends on an organization of work, and variable assemblages of human, animal, and thing’ (ibid., p.399).

It is a compelling account of diagrammatic forces, mixtures of concrete things and abstract relations disjunctively synthesising forms of expression and forms of content. Organisations of language, labour and life draw together, sometimes procuring oppressive regimes, sometimes manifesting liberatory openings.

The oft-cited dialogue between Foucault and Deleuze, ‘Intellectuals and power’ (1977) also needs to be signposted here, for the explicit question of power relations, power and knowledge, and relays between theory and practice are addressed, all of which pertain to a field of action in which the diagram partakes as organisational schema. Foucault suggests that the intellectual is the one who is positioned such that she or he can disclose political relations ‘where they were unsuspected’, and becomes the representative thinker who is rejected or prosecuted at the ‘precise moment when the facts become incontrovertible, when it is forbidden to say that the emperor wears no
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clothes’ (Foucault and Deleuze, 1977, p.207). The intellectual, I suggest, can be said to function like the idiot as defined by Stengers above; that is, the voice of resistance that, like the child who clearly sees that the emperor is naked, speaks out, thereby disrupting the status quo. The diagram can offer the means of performing such acts of resistance. Yet resistance does not necessarily have to be resisting a given state of affairs. Resistance can also be defined by the way in which some order, discovered and/or invented, is imposed on an otherwise chaotic milieu, an environment, a world, preferably by following the matter-flow of that milieu: resistance can operate diagrammatically. What Deleuze, reading Foucault, argues is that resistance comes first with respect to relations of power (Deleuze, 1988, p.89). Graphically imagining this seemingly paradoxical claim, Françoise Proust suggests that ‘resistance is like a line…at once straight and twisted, at once firm and supple’ (Proust, 2000, p.24), and whether intentionally or not this description is suggestive of what any architect would want to identify as the graphic marks, scratches, and rubbings out of a (conventionally defined) analytical or else projective diagram. The line of resistance is what Deleuze and Foucault call the line of the outside, a dynamic conceptually articulated membrane that resists the influx of chaotic forces, managing to hold at bay complete disorder, but at the same time filtering the forces of this otherwise inscrutable outside so that novel forms of life might be invented and/or discovered (see Frichot, 2009a; 2011; 2013). The diagram in question here ‘stems from the outside but the outside does not merge with any diagram, and continues instead to “draw” new ones’ (Deleuze, 1988, p.89). While there is no outside of power relations, yet there is this radical outside, discussed by Foucault, Deleuze, and also between Foucault and Maurice Blanchot, that has no relation to exteriority per se (Deleuze, 1988; Foucault, 1990; Blanchot, 1990). Deleuze explains that the outside is always an opening onto a future; but the future, or the dramatic ‘emergence of another world’ may turn out to express qualities that disturb the anthropocentric point of view. That is to say, man is not necessarily the master of diagrams. At the risk of setting up a temporal sequence, which would be misleading, the outside is what is yet to emerge, the virtual that animates all that comes to be actualised, the outside is the unthought, the unformed, and the very possibility of fact: a demanding conceptual composition whichever way this ever-transforming threshold is approached. Deleuze quietly explains that:

‘[w]e must take quite literally the idea that man is a face drawn in the sand between two tides: he is a composition appearing only between two others, a classical past that never knew him and a future that will no longer know him’ (Deleuze, 1988, p.89).

or as Foucault originally put it ‘one can certainly wager that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea’ (Foucault, 1970, p.387). Deleuze continues in order to reassure us that ‘this is no occasion for either rejoicing or weeping’ (Deleuze, 1988, p.89). In previous essays where I have discussed diagrammatics I have suggested that diagrams may in time ‘rewrite man’, a compelling image that Deleuze (and Foucault before him) scratches into the sand of our own shores when he shows us the outlines of an impassive face that is washed away with the rising tide (Foucault, 1970, p.387; Frichot, 2011, 2013).

From the outside of thought, a difficult diagrammatic connection can be construed to a new domain of theory going by the name of speculative realism, and signposted with the concept of the ‘Great Outdoors.’ In opening I have made reference to an ambiguous Great Outdoors, though this by no means stands in for the Outer Space into which the diagram of the Pioneer Plaque has been optimistically launched. The ‘Great Outdoors’, as
coined and defined by Quentin Meillassoux, is the way out of the correlationist trap that ties access to reality to the seemingly inescapable relation between the knowing subject and the object under interrogation; the difficult-to-shake presumption of the co-dependence of subjectivity and objectivity, otherwise known as the in-itself/for-itself distinction. Meillassoux’s project aims ‘to get out of ourselves, to grasp the in-itself, to know what is whether we are or not’ (Meillassoux, 2008, p.27). Without having to undertake the long detour through this argument (see Bryant et al., 2011; Roffe, 2012), and at the risk of misrepresentation, I simply want to pause on this (non)thought of the Great Outdoors, where a diagram such as the Pioneer Plaque may well wander as a strange ancestral or else ulterior object, requiring no human consciousness to motivate the work that it continues to undertake, whatever that might be. Meillassoux’s larger project disputes the privilege of the phenomenological subject, and the mistake here would be to conclude with the thought-image of a diagram as a series of graphic marks suffuse with human intentionality, when instead it is a question of the ubiquity of the diagram as non-visible force, or the diagrammatic as that matrix of forces that persists without the managing oversight of human consciousness. This unwieldy, and speculative line of argument is better promptly brought back to earth, down into the thickness of societies of control, onto the street, into our local neighbourhoods. While the diagram Out There, might speak to non-visible and nonhuman forces and ‘ulterior events’ (Meillassoux, 2008, p.112) occurring after the human, the ‘work’ of diagrammatics undertaken down here, even where invested in a misplaced or correlationist imaginary, still needs to be wrestled with.

Here, now, the exigency of a critical response is surely pressing. There is the analytical use of the diagram, highly visible, graphic, explanatory, deployed to reorganise the life of our cities on the ground, and the analytical diagram also lends its graphic, explanatory services to the projective diagram and how the latter offers instructions for future interactions and forms yet to come. Then there is the non-visible and near ubiquitous dynamic work of the diagram as organisational force stimulating local situations as well as global interactions. With Deleuze and Guattari’s oft-cited example of the man-animal-weapon/tool assemblage, the role of technological actors is also asserted in how they make relations both durable, as well as developmental. In ‘societies of control’ the diagram silently organises the movements and flows of ‘dividuals’ across cities and nation-states, seeking to encourage their encounters where this produces urban vibrancy and productivity, or else quietly refusing their passwords and passkeys where some characteristic of the ‘dividual’ in question is deemed to be a threat, or of negligible use to local development and growth. All of which calls on complex infrastructures of spaces, actors and technologies. The becoming indiscernible of the diagram in societies of control is a shift whereby ‘cells’, spatial compartments, segments or what Deleuze calls ‘molds’ operate with less efficacy than how the ‘modulation’ of the numerically defined ‘dividual’ is managed at local and global scales of interaction (Deleuze, 1995, p.178-181). That is, how an (in)dividual’s behaviours, movements, consumptions can be located in a mass or population in relation to other (in)dividuals. The phenomenological standpoint of the ‘individual’ is of minor importance when set against the ‘dividual’’s set of habits and behaviours, many of which have little to do with consciousness or the making of conscious decisions. What needs to be addressed is how decision-making processes (state, corporate, other) are subsequently monitored once these habits are managed en masse. The diagram emerges as a technology that makes certain societal habits durable, as well as (within limits) predictable. As tools of management, diagrams are
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highly analytical, explicitly visible, and graphically communicable, but what remains underestimated are the non-visible socio-political reorganisations of powers that the diagram as analytical and also projective tool can engender. While seemingly un-disciplined, and having fallen into some disrepute, (critical) architectural theory is a technology of thought with its own critical and creative diagrams, which can also be used as a means of grappling with formations of knowledge and power. It too can make use of analytical diagrams, but deployed instead as a means of questioning or countering those diagrams that seek to over-determine a population’s expressions of existence and modes of territorialisation. Where we shift the emphasis too much away from theory toward practice, immobilising the relay between the two, we arrive at projective production for production’s sake alone, and too much trust in the efficacy of the analytical diagram. Sometimes this will require a response in the mode of performing the idiot, as defined by Stengers, but less to create a consensual idiom than a slowing down of the work of diagrams through the creative noise of alternative diagrams.

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