

Diagrammatic Praxis

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Introduction

The research vectors I've been pursuing since September 2007 have primarily revolved around accumulating referential resources towards the production of a complimentary set of books and papers broadly focused on the relational dynamics between theory and practice in the arts. I have taken the concept of the **diagram** - a cartography of strategies of power - initiated by Foucault and rejuvenated by Deleuze, as foundational. Thinking the diagram entails negotiating several dimensions of relationality: between power relations immanent to the whole social field; between dualistic categories of knowledge (discursive/non-discursive, content/expression, visible/articulable, seeing /speaking); between chaos and order; catastrophe and rhythm; between continuity and discontinuity. One of many and various descriptions:

[The diagram] is the presentation of the relations between forces unique to a particular formation; it is the distribution of the power to affect and the power to be affected; it is the mixing of non-formalized pure functions and unformed pure matter; [...] a transmission or distribution of particular features. Deleuze, *Foucault*, p72-73

Contemporary interpretations, remixes and fusions of diagrammatic concepts extend to a wide array of thinkers and artists (see Bibliography). It is the production of multiplicitous meaning, or the diagram of meaning immanent to the relation between content and expression, thinking and the unthought, seeing and speaking that interests me. In my doctoral thesis "The Translocal Event and the Polyhythmic Diagram" I scratched the surface of diagrammatic praxis as performative, primarily emphasizing the conditions of real time, collaborative image/sound improvisation in distributed networks. Brian Massumi and Erin Manning's work on the *biogrammatic* suggests a fresh topological register for discerning processual tendencies in performing arts practice; clues as to what might be culled as an affecting of effects that, when contextualized as a 'diagram of practice as perception,' resonates between theory and practice, between the diagrammatic and the biogrammatic (sympathetic to the 'methodologies' of Henri Bergson's *intuition* and Felix Guattari's *transversality*).

Research Overview

There are two main movement threads to this long-term project:

Diagrammatic Creative Processes: The speculative movement-mapping of creative processes through the discourse of the diagram: connecting the unformed, virtual yet real intensities of the abstract machine, the informal diagram, with the more commonplace action of *diagramming* as a thinking-feeling-articulating event. Though a focused lens on research practice in the arts, certain stages and patterns of creative processes will be examined, from the situated metapractice of the informal diagram, through the encounter between content and expression to the decisiveness of a completed work. Current trends in mind-mapping, research practice, transdisciplinary synergies between the cognitive sciences, arts and technology in collaborative project development, underscore emerging transversal research/creation methods.

Diagrammatic Arts: A map of movements in the arts that have diagrammatic concerns: the compositional forces that transduce processes of perceptibility such as drawing, collage, cut-ups, audiovisual remixes and improvisation techniques. Historical referencing will highlight critical/fringe art movements that prefigure contemporary installation art and LiveArt (performance, music, media, digital arts) such as the Situationists/Lettrists, Conceptual Art and Fluxus. Navigations of image and text synergies are central to this exploration in which aesthetic politics (affective ethics) play a key role. The diagrammatic/biogrammatic aspects of my doctoral research will be retooled to enable new relations, sensitive to the political and

economic (post-Fordist, immaterial labor) environment that situates just-in-time creative production and consumption today.

Project Synopsis:

The Diagram of Research Practice in the Arts: Practice as Perception

Thinking around-thru-in diagrammatic praxis is a long-term post-doctoral research, supported by my fellowship with ARTI. I am engaged in experimenting with diagramming in several dimensions, focusing on the **situated diagram of practice as perception** in two registers:

1) the creative diagrammatic processes of thinking-feeling-articulating
Focusing on theory and practice of the diagram as a creative tool.

Artists cited: Arakawa and Gins, Peter Eisenman, John Cage, William Burroughs, Gertrude Stein, Scott McCloud, Paul Klee, Robert Smithson, Guy Debord

Theorists cited: Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Brian Massumi, Erin Manning, Gilbert Simondon, Bernard Cache, Adrian Mackenzie, J.R. Osborn, John Rajchman, Robert Sobieszek, Kenneth Knoespel

2) the situated ethico-aesthetics and biopolitics of research/creation

Artists: Conceptual Art, Fluxus, Situationists/Lettrists

Theorists: Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Suely Rolnik, Gerald Raunig, Jacques Ranciere, Brian Holmes, Paolo Virno

Three register of diagrammatics:

- 1) **the informal diagram (abstract machine):** Foucault showed the diagram to be the presentation of power-relations between forces. In Foucault's most famous example, the prison acts as the confluence of content (prisoners) and expression (law). Diagrams proliferate (the Klee diagram/machine, the quantum physics machine, the speed-dating diagram, the stock exchange diagram, the Amsterdam machine, etc). Deleuze and Guattari have called the abstract machine "pure matter/function"; the processual conjunction of content and expression; actual yet uneffectuated. This project will explore the resonant relations between theory and practice becoming-form; diagrammatics as immanent cause of research/creation.
- 2) **the inflected diagram (biogram):** A spatio-temporal-material contraction of the abstract machine (informal diagram). The processual thinking-feeling (Massumi) of the diagram becoming-cartographic; synaesthetic conceptual mapping. A play of forces, a series of relays, affecting a tendency toward an inflection of the informal diagram becoming-form. The **inflected diagram (biogram)** folds and unfolds perception, appearances; rides the line of becoming between content and expression; intuitively transduces the actualizing (thinking, drawing, marking, erasing) of matter-movement, of expressivity-movement to functions and vice-versa. *"To follow the flow of matter... is intuition in action."* (ATP p.409). This processual stage is the prehending process of the appearance and reality of the virtual actualizing (Whitehead); the creative construction of a new reality (Deleuze and Guattari). This is the **biogrammatic stage of the diagrammatic**. It is paradoxically double in that it is both the actualizing of the abstract machine (contraction) and the recursive counter-actualization of the formal diagram (détournement).
- 3) **the formal diagram:** the material markings and traces of a diagrammatic process, their doubly articulated 'capture' as form. In the transduction from abstract machine to artwork these relays affect the realization of a fixed form or artifact, of the diagrammatic illustration/ visualization.

Project dissemination:

The project will ostensibly take the form of two 'books' or documentations; a theoretical book on diagrammatic praxis; a graphic artist book/diary of my own diagrammatic process of

mixing the textual, visual and audible materials of the metapractice. Several papers will be published on the theme in various books and journals in 2008-2009.

ARTI projects/presentations 2007-2008

11 October 2007: 3rd Cyclus presentation

OCT: MIT book reviewer – Sonic Warfare by Steve Goodman

NOV: Peer reviewer for Fibreculture Journal

7-10 November: Mutamorphosis Conference on Art and science
“Extreme Intervals and Sensory Fusions: The Hinge”
Synesthesia debate with Roger Malina

Dec: Draft paper for FLOSS+Art book: “Who Done It? Ethico-aesthetics, the production of subjectivity and attribution”. Publishing date: Sep 08, Mute

JAN-Feb: The *Fieldings* project with choreographer Nora Heilmann
5 February: Premiere at Something Raw Festival

4 – 22 Feb: LISA artist residency
Paper in progress

11 April- 26 May: Concordia Senselab artist residency in Montreal, CA by invitation from Brian Massumi and Erin Manning, Continuing research on Diagrammatic Praxis.

23-25 May: Into the Folds workshop facilitation

1 May: Advisory Board *Inflexions* online journal.

1 July: AHRC ICT Methods Network Series 'Digital Research in the Arts and Humanities':
Interfaces of Performance

1 July: Vocabularatories: paper “Textologies: The political aesthetics of the diagram”

14-17 September: Keynote; DRHA 2008: New Communities of Knowledge and Practice'
conference to be held in September of this year at Cambridge.

Completed and in-progress papers: 2007/2008

“**Extreme Intervals and Sensory Fusions: The Hinge**” (abstract)
<http://www.mutamorphosis.org/index.php?lang=en&node=120&catid=108&id=27>)

“**Who Done It? Ethico-aesthetics, the production of subjectivity and attribution**”
Forthcoming Sept08 in the book *FLOSS+Art* published by Mute Magazine

LISA: The Residency

“**The Biogrammatic Politics of Performance**”
Forthcoming Dec08 in the book *Interfaces of Performance* from the Digital Research in the Arts and Humanities Series, Goldsmiths

Abstract

Diagrammatic practice affords a perspective on the Interrelations between compositional forces. Informal diagrams, or abstract machines, are immanently performative or as Deleuze has

commented, are “closer to theater than to the factory”. Highly fluid and unstable, they elicit a dynamic encounter of power relations affecting matter and functions that produce events. Concepts and ‘theories’ of the diagram, as explored by Foucault, Deleuze among others, has, for example, influenced architectural practice over the past decade but its ethical, aesthetic and political synergies with the performing arts is still underdeveloped.

This paper will take a look at the processual, distributed aesthetics that emerged in the heyday of 90’s digital arts, particularly in the domain of translocal VJ/DJ performance, and chart its predictable transformation into Web 2.0 social networking culture, following a curve from commodification to just-in-time capital subsumption. Modulations between content and expression, the visible and the articulable are, arguably, intensified in performance practice that moves through the disciplinary power of the diagram towards the biopower of the ‘biogram’ (Massumi).

Early methods of digitally enabled, translocal interaction through the unstable/unformed improvisatory encounter to current trends in plug-and-play-meet-and-greet performativity will be explored.

“The Post-Spectacular Derivative” Forthcoming Dec08

Abstract

The dynamic shapeshift from a *society of discipline* (Foucault) to a *society of control* (Deleuze) resonates with certain dimensional qualities of Debord’s *society of the spectacle*. That shapeshift can be further felt in a migration from psychogeographies to cybertologies. This paper looks at societal paradigms situated in the conflux of contemporary locative media and LiveArt practices. It explores the affective tonalities of the détournement from the perspective of the ubiquitous image in the situated spectacle; from surveillance in the silicon panopticon to the event of its *felt sensation*; from the political protocols of *play* to the eventspace of *chance and necessity* (Nietzsche). If performing “place” through radical disorientation was evident in the ontology of early Situationist dérives in Paris and Amsterdam in the 50’s and 60’s, the technological accoutrement for triangulated orientation in many current artistic projects has détourned the dérive in significant ways. How are pro-situ sensibilities reterritorialised in the age of wireless techno-nomadism?

The psychogeographic experience of drifting through an urban landscape without purpose, guided by the shifting rhythms of random and selective attraction was once a ‘subversive’ aesthetic, primarily due to its playful or ludic character. The urban drift or *dérive* of the Situationists has subsequently become a common referent in contemporary locative media projects that mix performance strategies with new media technologies. The connotations of an urban dérive were once political, alluding to both the poverty *and* potential of “everyday life.” There is some evidence in contemporary locative media and LiveArt derivatives of a situationist sensibility re-imagined as a hyperreality spectacle. But the commodified aesthetics of a control society emerge in an urban sandbox with new toys and protocols: RFID’s, GPS, WIFI, Bluetooth, mobile phones. Art and technology collaborations “exploit” hand-me-down military technologies to perpetuate zones of playfulness and storytelling. In a post-spectacular Web 2.0 world in which images are created by the public and distributed by the corporate, the stakes of play and interplay are changing as “free” play is subsumed by the rules of a bigger game. The political and affective “situations” once advanced by Debord are now folded into the confounding ethical complexities of a late capitalism awash in the immanent powerplay of affective intensities fuelled by the ‘creative capital’ of the post-spectacular.

Protocols of *play*, so important to the Situationists, factor heavily in the evolving milieu. The ideological surge towards developing creative, playful online and locative networks in the 90’s and early 00’s has been steadily absorbed by the commodification of that momentum in an ever-expanding gamespace (Wark). What role(s) might the artist play in these conditions? Considered within the event dynamics of Nietzsche’s “chance and necessity”, can the good players be spotted from the bad in post-spectacular locative media artmaking?

“Textologies: The political aesthetics of the diagram” Forthcoming: published by Vocabulaboratories

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