

A fragment on diagrams and dreams.

Diagram: actual&&virtual

The diagram is simultaneously an actual concrete arrangement of representational elements as well as a virtual device, an arrangement of potentialities, capacities and tendencies. Following Deleuze we can think of the actual and the virtual as entangled parts of the real¹. We can think of the diagram as a heuristic bridge between the virtual realm of possibility and the already determined realm of the actual. The actual and the virtual are not separate categories but complementary properties of the 'real' which are mediated by the diagram in a relationship of simultaneous multiplicity²

The virtual shadows the actual as "the structure [of] the space of [the] possible,"³ while simultaneously functioning as the force that breaks up the continuous space of total possibility into the discrete space of what in actuality occurs. The diagram can be understood as the mechanism through which variation (and variability) is mapped against a zone of possibility⁴. The diagram is the process through which the possible and the actual are negotiated in terms of structure, if not delimited in actual practice. The diagram operates here as as a collection of boundaries, and linkages and critical thresholds which structure the tendency of what has arrived, what is yet to come and what might not make it.

Understanding that the diagram operates as a bridge between the virtual and the actual we must be mindful that bridges are governed by and reflective of relations of power. The classic illustration of this diagrammatic arrangement is the map and territory relation of nation states. The map stands as a diagram of the virtual notion of national territorial boundaries which might determine, but do not necessarily reflect, the actual boundaries in any given territory. These political boundaries are primarily virtual, but through the diagrammatic function of cartography, are actualised as geographical boundaries through disciplinary graphic conventions which collapse diagrammatic uncertainty into geopolitical authority. However the diagrammatic actualisation of boundaries does not mean that there exists boundaries in actual space. Rather the diagram (in this case a geographical map) functions as the force of a single possibility pressing against actual conditions in space. The idea of a diagrammatic force implies that the virtual is not a single continuous space of possibilities (although colonial virtual space might contain this universalisation as a possibility) but, rather, that the virtual is a series of potentials, or variable virtuality's, competing for actualisation.

The tendency of disciplinary conventions (eg. cartography) to stand as statements of fact cannot survive an ongoing confrontation with their own virtuality- that part of their diagrammatic function which stands as a structure of possibility, in plural, not universal. While any diagram propagates through actual power, its virtuality simultaneously reveals the limits of that power. Ironically a diagram's power is bounded (limited) by its inherent unboundedness. Which is to say, a diagram is always only an option⁵.

The optionality of diagrams does not negate the critical role they play in relations of power. While any given diagram might not reflect actual conditions, diagrams are neither objects of fiction nor speculative propositions. They are structural mechanisms which put virtual conditions in the realm of desire, yearning, ambition, longing, need, presumption and belief into relation with actual conditions in the realm of ownership, occupation, exploitation, misuse, allocation. In order to structure relations between virtual and actual conditions, diagrams must function as structural forces asserting "the power to be, pressing, passing, eventuating into ever new forms, in a cavalcade of emergence."⁶ The tendency of a diagram to act as a structural force is a product of its entanglement with those things that it is not yet, or those things that it might yet become. Which is to say: diagrams derive power through unrealised actualities.

Brian Massumi designates the virtual as "a force of existence: the press of the next, coming to pass,"⁷ suggesting that the virtual is not a transcendent structure but an immanent relation of potential and appearance. This immanence is a temporal relation characterised by untimeliness and imprecision in which the virtual and the actual are always out of sync. It is the burden of the diagram to synchronise these disarticulate tendencies, to bring the actual world and the virtual

world into contact. In this task the mundane object of the diagram is “always too early or too late (perhaps even both at once)”⁸.

The diagram is less a statement of intention than a mapping of a possibility space, a-putting-into-relation of the structure of a given possibility space. Put simply, the diagram only reveals the ways in which, for example, desire and ownership are related, not the ways they are, or will be, enacted. The diagram is the actualisation of a virtual structure and therefore a collapsing of possibility into the actual. Even where the diagram functions as a map of variation, presenting a multiplicity of possibilities, it still fixes the limits of that multiplicitous possibility and therefore is itself predisposed to superfluosity, to totally missing the point. This is both the risk and the promise of the diagram. A proper account of the virtual demonstrates the pitfalls of attempting any formalisation diagrammatic logic. Indeed the “classic complaint against diagrams is that they are misleading” and resist the sound formalisation needed to “prevent ambiguity and misleading”⁹

Any given diagram is itself an actual thing, a representation which reveals *some* virtual structures and puts them into relation with *some* actual structures. It is important to note that, as an actualised object, the diagram is not a realisation of the virtual (it does not make the virtual real) since the virtual is itself already real. We must keep in mind that “[t]he reality of the virtual is structure. We must avoid giving the elements and relations that form a structure an actuality which they do not have, and withdrawing from them a reality which they have.”¹⁰

The virtual aspects of the diagram are precisely those which are not yet stabilised and represented in its actual form. They are the parts which structure its form without themselves taking form. The parts of any diagram space which resists the attempt to be diagrammed. The diagram is therefore always a limited expression of any possibility space. The diagram is always partial, ambivalent and open to misreading.

Dreams

It is important to acknowledge that in configuring a diagrammatic mode of decolonial meaning-making, the process of putting-things-into-relation is also an extra-rational function. That is a process grounded in “the inseparability of the being and the nonbeing of persons and things,”¹¹ and importantly, in those ways of knowing more or less outside the limits of colonial relations of power, and thinking (through) power. Guided by DW Winnicott’s counsel that “[t]hinking is a snare and a delusion unless the unconscious is taken into account.”¹² the diagram, as a fugitive device to be used explicitly to ensnare our thinking, must account for the unconscious (as well its as other psycho-spiritual entanglements).

Sharon Sliwinski’s notion of dream-life as one of the key points of contact with unconscious offers a useful mechanism for a tentatively recognising the diagrammatic place and performance of the unconscious. Sliwinski (after Freud and Levi-Strauss) casts the dream as “a particular form of thinking”, characterised by “mental bricolage: a particular form of thinking that reuses and recombines bits and pieces from the dreamer’s diurnal perceptions and vast storehouse of memory traces.”¹³ Understanding dreams as those experiences which put the conscious into relation with the unconscious, we can suppose that dreams have a diagrammatic function of bringing the virtual potentialities of the unconscious into contact with the sensible realm of consciousness. In keeping with the diagram’s imprecise function of putting the virtual into relation with the actual, dreams make unconscious structures apparent but ambivalent.

The function of the diagram is to put-into-relation the virtual and actual as conditions of possibility. The diagram is therefore an actualising performance of the virtual as an ambivalent space, a representational (but not symbolic) performance of an actual space of possibility - albeit one deeply troubled and limited by its imprecision and untimeliness. “In a sound formal diagrammatic system there would be no room for misusing diagrams and, hence, diagrams would not be able to mislead us”¹⁴. However diagrams are unsound, and their decolonial promise derives from their inherent instability. If dreaming is the psychic twin of diagramming, then perhaps the diagram is itself a form of dreaming, as well as a dream diary. A performance of space and a performance as space - a system that makes room.

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- ¹ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 109.
 - ² Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 145
 - ³ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 109.
 - ⁴ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 109.
 - ⁵ Gaztambide-Fernández, “Decolonial options and artistic/aesthetic entanglements”, 198.
 - ⁶ Massumi, “Envisioning the Virtual”, 2.
 - ⁷ Massumi, “Envisioning the Virtual”, 2.
 - ⁸ Massumi, “Envisioning the Virtual”, 3.
 - ⁹ Mofteki, Shin “Visual Reasoning with Diagrams”, xi
 - ¹⁰ DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory*, 109.
 - ¹¹ Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, 145.
 - ¹² Sliwinski, *Mandela’s Dark Years: A Political Theory of Dreaming*, 15.
 - ¹³ Sliwinski, *Mandela’s Dark Years: A Political Theory of Dreaming*, 15.
 - ¹⁴ Mofteki, Shin “Visual Reasoning with Diagrams”, xi

DeLanda, Manuel. 2016. *Assemblage Theory*. Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2016

Gaztambide-Fernández, Rubén. 2014. "Decolonial options and artistic/aesthetic entanglements: An interview with Walter D. Mignolo." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 1: 196

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