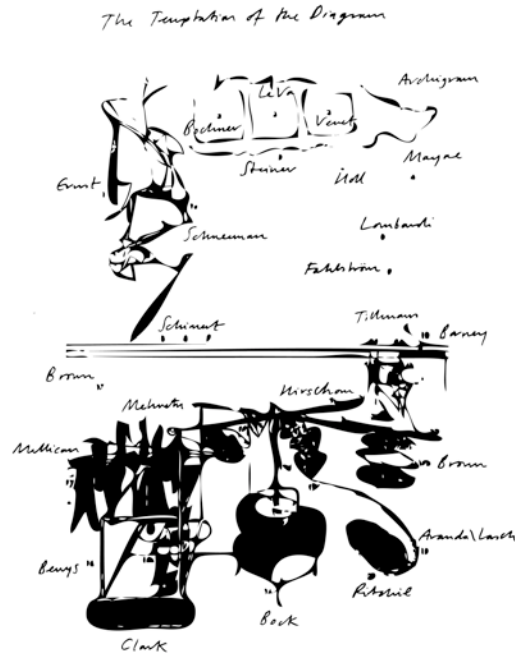


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The Temptation of the Diagram

Organized by Matthew Ritchie

March 30 - April 27, 2013

Andrea Rosen Gallery 2

Featuring: Aranda/Lasch, Archigram, Matthew Barney, Joseph Beuys, Earle Brown, Trisha Brown, Mel Bochner, John Bock, Lygia Clark, Max Ernst, Öyvind Fahlström, Thomas Hirschhorn, Steven Holl, Barry Le Va, Mark Lombardi, Thom Mayne, Julie Mehretu, Matt Mullican, Matthew Ritchie, Carolee Schneemann, Katy Schimert, Rudolf Steiner, Wolfgang Tillmans, and Bernar Venet

Excerpt from the catalog essay by Matthew Ritchie:

The Temptation of the Diagram

In Flaubert's 'The Temptation of St Anthony'; the tortured hermit; besieged by an encyclopedic parade of gorgeous visions, finally calls out: "Somewhere there must be primordial figures whose bodily forms are only symbols, could I but see them I would know the link between matter and thought; I would know in what Being consists!" It is the last, impossible temptation.

This is not a history of the diagram, or a complete overview of its status, presence and use today, but rather compelling examples of a specific kind of diagram, hand-made diagrams by artists and thinkers that describe imaginary spaces, diagrams of pure ideas. Perhaps they can somewhat counter the residual presumption that thinking runs counter to aesthetic contemplation; that information is not beautiful. Perhaps we can see these diagrams as the artists do, central to their thinking and our thinking about art-making.

This modest exhibition explores the diagram as an essential mode of artistic practice. As Susanne Leeb writes: “diagrams escape the insoluble dialectic of absence and presence which pervades the play of representation, yet...diagrams have no status in art per se.” In art historical terms, the diagram is both refuge and refugee, a universal visual bridge between the written and the seen, but without a home in either. The most common form of graphesis in the world is excluded. In ‘The Culture of Diagram’ John Bender and Michael Marrinan identified the re-emergence of the diagram in the 17th century as a tool of research, whose ability to concretize process can be distinguished from Foucault’s concept of the ‘table’ or disciplinary array, by its ability to cut across boundaries. Where the table systematizes and controls information, the diagram “vectorizes the subject with a meaning, with a direction freed from ancient eschatology” (as Quentin Meillassoux recently described the hidden diagram of Mallarmé’s Coup de Des). Diagrams are, as Leeb puts it “A tool for the making of relationships and for the abandonment of rational procedure.” For Reviel Netz, “the diagram is not a representation of something else, it is the thing itself”. As for the anchorite saint, so for these artists; the temptation, “to assume all forms - penetrate each atom – be matter itself”, is irresistible.

Moving around the room, possible connections emerge. The Universal Tetrahedron collapses into Max Ernst’s ‘Let There Be Fashion, Down With Art!’ as the dada mind-space theater blossoms into a century of endless production and consumption, epitomized by the absurd inventory of props and equipment for Oyvind Fahlstrom’s ‘Plan for Phase 1, Dr Schweitzer’s last mission’; his complex installation for the 1966 Venice Biennial. Wolfgang Tillmans, Matt Mullican, Mark Lombardi and Julie Mehretu’s works embrace the inventorying of the world, documenting, labelling and connecting while Thomas Hirschorn’s ‘Equality Float Vitrine’ provides a bridge between ideology and the human body. Matthew Barney, Katy Schimert, Jon Bock and Carolee Schneeman offer us proposals for a world performed, enacted, embodied, explored and penetrated while Rudolf Steiner and Joseph Beuys extend and double the connections between mind and body; the human world and the ancestral realms, joining the politics of energy to the dimension of pure forms. In the drawings of the composer Earle Brown, master of ‘open forms’, the concretist forms of the sculptors Barry Le Va and Lygia Clark and the movement graph of choreographer Trisha Brown the vocabulary of pure form is unfurled, folded and re-folded across sound, space and time. The pure geometries of Bernar Venet become the foundation of both real and imagined spaces in drawings by architects, Archigram, Thom Mayne and Steven Holl, while Mel Bochner’s ‘48’ ‘Around The Room’ returns us to the universal simplicity of a diagrammatic gesture that can be conducted both anywhere and everywhere.

If it is becoming possible again to see painting as “a kind of quasi-person”, as Isabelle Graw wrote recently in ‘Thinking Through Painting’, then the diagram is its quasi-nervous system, the foundational connection between its parts and to its precedents. Perhaps that’s why we prefer it hidden, because it reminds us of the exposed nerves lying close below the skin. Graw’s timely reconsideration of painting as an index of traces is firmly grounded in Frederic Stjernfelt’s magisterial ‘Diagrammatology’; the bedrock on which any discussion of the diagram must ultimately rest. Stjernfeldt characterizes the diagram as a form of hypostatic abstraction and convincingly argues that any painting, or sketch, always indexes another group of terms, always refers back to a kind of sublated or hidden initial diagram. As he puts it “the Piercian viewpoint will maintain that any use of a picture that rationally distinguishes its parts and their interrelation and indulges in experiments with those interrelations is diagrammatical.” Diagrams are painting with the flesh off, thinking with a glass skull. In the presence of diagrams, the profound questions of scale, distance, proximity and imagined immunity that define our use of any shared informational space are all too painfully evident.

Stjernfelt further explains how by building diagrams of thought we are necessarily constructing a vehicle for the real exploration of imaginary spaces. By proposing new conventions of connection, diagrams both reinvigorate theories of picture and extend the possibilities of agency within it. That is not to suggest the diagram constitutes an easy escape route, or a trap door for the visionary. Although for artists it may be precisely the progress their work makes away from the original index that constitutes its true ‘sensual objecthood’, the diagram is where concepts must connect to their consequences, ideologies are inexorably networked to the concepts and compromises that undergird them. Diagrams reference an operable dimensionality. Diagrams, seen and hidden,

constitute the pivotal means for commutation between the multitudinous spaces of prediction, memory, fantasy, language, metaphor and instruction. If all this seems romantic, it is. The diagram is a trace of our collective efforts to articulate and negotiate an almost impossible circumstance; reality itself.

Imagine a single dimension, a point. Add a line. Now add an arrow to the line, a vector. Can you imagine another dimension? Go ahead. Add another line, another and another. Now add arrows to all those lines. More! Are they all going in the same direction? Impossible!

Are we there yet?

"The movement is everything, the final goal nothing".
1896, Eduard Bernstein.

Matthew Ritchie's installations, which integrate painting, wall drawings, light boxes, performance, sculpture, and projections, are investigations of the idea of information explored through science, architecture, history and the dynamics of culture, defined equally by their range and their lyrical visual language. In 2001, Time magazine listed Ritchie as one of 100 innovators for the new millennium, for exploring "the unthinkable or the not-yet-thought." His work has been shown in numerous exhibitions worldwide, including the Whitney Biennial, the Sydney Biennial, the Sao Paulo Biennial, the Venice Architecture Biennale, the Seville Biennale, and the Havana Biennale, and is in the collections of the Museum of Modern Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Whitney Museum of American Art, the Albright-Knox Museum, the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and other institutions worldwide, including a permanent large-scale installation at MIT. He has written for Artforum, Flash Art, Art & Text, and the Contemporary Arts Journal, and is a contributor to Edge. In 2012 Ritchie was Artist in Residence at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles.

Ritchie is currently Mellon Artist in Residence and Adjunct Professor in the Graduate Visual Arts Program at Columbia University, New York, where he has organized two public workshops this spring to examine how we can extend understanding and use of our new, current dimension – where every image in history can be seen at once, every idea can be communicated, rebutted and digitally reformatted, and every space can host any form of presence – in the shared space of culture. The next workshop, Art, Information and Networks, will feature Albert-László Barabási and Caroline Jones, moderated by Matthew Ritchie, on April 19 at 6 PM at Columbia University. It is free and open to the public; for more information, visit arts.columbia.edu. Ritchie will also take part in Rhizome's Seven on Seven conference in April.

About Gallery 2

Andrea Rosen conceived Gallery 2 in 1999 as a liberating arena in which to consider new ideas and create parallel perspectives to the Gallery's primary program, and as a means of fulfilling the Gallery's responsibility to broaden visual references and education for its audience. An inspiring and highly important part of the Gallery's exhibition program, Gallery 2 was formerly located adjacent to the main gallery at the 525 West 24th Street location, prior to the recent opening of separate Gallery 2 space at 544 West 24th Street. Gallery 2 has developed a reputation for significant historical exhibitions, presenting first-time, one-person shows, and shedding light on lesser known aspects of prominent artists' practices. Many of the shows conceived in Gallery 2 have gone on to have other lives in other exhibitions and institutions. The program affords the Gallery the opportunity to work with young artists who might not otherwise not have the opportunity to show within the primary space as well as esteemed independent curators and art historians. Andrea Rosen Gallery has been built on the ideals of what it means to represent a specific group of artists over a very long period of time, but it has also come to realize that infusing the gallery with one-time projects enhances the vocabulary, meaning, and impact of the gallery's agenda.

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