

## THE DIAGRAM IS THE NEW SYMBOL– DELEUZE ON FOUCAULT

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**Abstract.** The present text aims to validate the title-argument – *The Diagram is the new symbol* – through a triple conjoined approach. The first one considers a methodology and a philosophy specifically applied to the diagram in relation to the sign-symbol, appreciating the diagram's directions, dynamics, speeds and possibilities of synthesis and outlining its status as a process or assemblage of forces. The second concerns the diagram built by/through the symbol, which succeeds, in turn, in becoming the interpreter, the bearer of another symbol, in the sense in which the diagram is a representative type, and the symbol, a general sign regarding the intended object. Through Deleuze on Foucault (1988), the third approach insists on the route travelled from the archive to the mapping and the diagram by resorting to a point-punctual (re)reading applied to the texts of the archivist and cartographer Foucault, with the intention of highlighting a system of thought within which the effects and the meanings of power demand to be diagrammed.

**Keywords:** *Diagram; Diagrammatic; Symbol; Deleuze; Foucault*

### *The Diagram – a Methodology and a Philosophy*

Relating the diagram to the sign-symbol, James Williams<sup>1</sup> validated it by extracting it from a specific point (within an underlying substrate), that of the selective approach and the primacy of speculative philosophy, explicitly valuing the hypostasis/hypothesis of the existence of a “proposed, rather than inferred, formal core”, whose intensities mark and change the relationships they (co)imply and the elements they intersect with<sup>2</sup>. In relation to the sign-symbol, the diagram is accepted as more than a concept-term: as a channel for the meaningful transmission and imprinting of intensity changes and a reorienting marker of the changeable directions of the sign-symbol, a way that sums up and exposes a combinatorial set of “areas, flows and patterns of increase or decrease”<sup>3</sup>. Integrated and integrable to its own philosophy of the extensible process, the approach indicates a placing “external to general claims regarding the truth and validity of the sign”, and lends theoretical substance to the perspective that “for the sign, the meaning of diagrams represents a set of pragmatic considerations, (...) the sign being defined by an open suite of diagrams”<sup>4</sup>.

From the position(ing) cumulation exposed here, we can consider the definitional anchoring of the diagram within a pragmatic arrangement of meaning, through the eminently verifiable triad: *the diagram is a suggestion of the processes involved in selecting a sign; the diagram is integrated to a set of alternative diagrams; the sign relates to the diagram through the very negations or limitations that the process entails*<sup>5</sup>. This certifies, in fact, the concept that Simon O'Sullivan<sup>6</sup> named and accepted as a specific dynamic: “[...] the diagram leads, often, to synthesis, in favour of the illustration of an already operated synthesis (it starts as an illustration... then it spirals outwards...). It works at a different speed than discursivity, and certainly at a faster speed in the experimental plan. Diagrams are like fiction, but thought provoking, however”<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> J. Williams, "What is a diagram (for a sign)?", in *Parrhesia* no. 23, 2016, 41-61.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 41-42.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 44.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47.

<sup>6</sup> S. O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 6.

Placed on the *limen* between/inside the visible and the articulable, with abstract functions capable of generating a system, the conceptual diagram is accredited by Jakub Zdebik<sup>8</sup> with valences of a “dynamic, fluctuating process occurring between static structures. As a concept, it describes the flexible, elastic, intangible functions before the named elements settle into a definitive form. The schematic process could be imagined either as a physical state, or as a system that is atomized by abstract incorporeal features and then reconfigured into another state or system”<sup>9</sup>. Jakub Zdebik translates the meaning of the diagram from the suggestion, from reporting to the sign-symbol, from the process or from the concept towards the methodology itself, through its very ability to transgress from one system to another, from an accumulation of abstract forces which make up a system and which, in turn, can be reapplied to another system, by *extraction - translation - concretization*.

### *The Diagram is the New Symbol*

Frederik Stjernfelt<sup>10</sup> places the diagram in the position of interpreter of the symbol, valuing Charles Peirce's perspective, that of a *sign in actu*, thus validating the *diagram in actu* as a share-part involved in the interference process through the very symbolic meaning it possesses. The issued and verified actional logic is that logic according to which the diagram, constructed by/through the symbol, succeeds in its turn in becoming the interpretant of another symbol. This, in the sense in which the diagram is a representative type, and the symbol a general sign regarding the targeted object. “This link forms the defining semiotic connection of the diagram. The symbol refers to a general object, while (...) the possibility of the diagram consists in letting the latter constitute the meaning of the former and therefore refer to the same object (...) a crucial point for to understanding the double determination of the diagram – iconic and symbolic, perceptual and general”<sup>11</sup>. Hence the evidence that the diagram is double-governed: on the one hand, by the symbol and by the type of rational relations used; but also, by the empirical phenomenon concerned. Frederik Stjernfelt documents Charles Peirce's recourse to the symbol section, considering it either as a designation of an idea-thing, as a connection of a set of possible indices, or even as a law or “regularity of the indefinite future,” a rule capable of determining its own performer. The symbol pre-constitutes itself as a proto-diagram, to the extent that its predicative aspect is iconic, transgressing the pose of the interpreter and becoming itself a germinal point/sign, in the sense in which the diagram, subject to the rule of observation, explains the habits inherent in a symbol and leaves open the possibility of building a new general predicate. According to Frederik Stjernfelt “it is perfectly possible to let a diagram explain the content of a symbol whose referent is only fictitious. On the other hand, an important property of the diagram is to be able to reach beyond the scope of any diagram interested in representing inconsistent symbols; this being the very power of diagram formalization: every (correct) diagram corresponds to a possibility”<sup>12</sup>.

If Frederik Stjernfelt does not integrate Deleuze into the decisive Pleiad of diagramatological positioning and interpretation except through a brief footnote reference [“Despite currents of dissent (Lévi-Strauss's insistence on signs or Lyotard's on iconism (“figure”), this particular brand of anti-iconism was commonplace for most variants of structuralism in the 1960s (Greimas, Barthes, Lacan), and also for so-called poststructuralism (Derrida, *Deleuze* – we note, Foucault<sup>13</sup>), the statement *the diagram is the new symbol* extracts its functional substance from the very perspective of reception proposed by G. Deleuze, according to which its function consists in the act of *suggesting*<sup>14</sup>. Starting from such a statement, W.J.T. Mitchell<sup>15</sup> proposes the recourse to

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<sup>8</sup>J. Zdebik, *Deleuze and the diagram: aesthetic threads in visual organization*, Continuum, 2012.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibidem*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>10</sup>Fr. Stjernfelt, *Diagrammatology An Investigation on the Borderlines of Phenomenology, Ontology, and Semiotics*, Springer, 2007.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 97.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 98.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 51.

<sup>14</sup>G. Deleuze, “The Diagram”, in Constantin V. Boundas (ed.), *The Deleuze Reader*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1993, p. 194.

<sup>15</sup>W. J. T. Mitchell, “Diagrammatology”, in *Critical Inquiry*, Spring, 1981, pp. 622-633.

*diagrammatology*, in itself an explicit-conscious-systematic formula, as an alternative to the impossibility of articulating the set of intuitions or interpretations already offered by questioning the act of reaching form through the mediation of diagrams, accrediting *diagrammatology* with the meaning of thinking-diagram, of metaphor<sup>16</sup>.

The named relationship is a self-deductive one, with two interrelat(ioning) *caputs*, in the sense that the Peirce model remains an attractive one for Deleuze (and Guattari) but with alternative valences, in and through a “free use of Peirce, by borrowing terms as they change their connotations”<sup>17</sup>.

What prevails is the concept of the diagram, via Peirce, (re)valued through the very meaning of the function of experimental term-creator of new relations, with Deleuze and Guattari operating a double action process by extracting the diagram from Peirce's scheme in order to (re)invest it with the valences of a philosophy of difference, as an act of synthesizing or modelling it.

### *Deleuze on Foucault: From Archive to Mapping and Diagram*

*Deleuze on Foucault*<sup>18</sup> becomes a debate that is situated, in its opening part, inside the corpus of the mechanics of a route leading from the archive/mapping to the diagram. The working premise, which Gilles Deleuze poses, as a trigger, at the foundation of the entire approach, consists in the appointment or self-proclamation of a new archivist, contested in equal doses between/by the image of a representative of structural technology or of technocracy, a proclaimer of modelling the death of man, a promoter of perspectives that are impossible to support by arguments, but also an innovative advocate of a radical way of thinking. All of these are arranged by Deleuze in/from the perspective of Gogol rather than Kafka (if for Gogol, the novel is like a poem, for Foucault, Deleuze states, philosophy is necessarily both poetry and fiction in the sense that its statements are like dreams-becoming-kaleidoscopes by reference to the cause and the diagonal considered; in the dream – a transformation dependent on the targeted corpus and the diagonal line followed, and in reality – a reference to the existing and open totality from/of the statement<sup>19</sup>).

A double clarification is required here, determined by the very method that Foucault applies to Deleuze (and to Guattari), in the Preface of his work *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*<sup>20</sup>, a *detente* which, implicitly, can be attributed to himself. Deleuze's opening argument confirms Foucault's method of reading Deleuze – delimiting himself from the valences of a new theoretical reference and the search-at-all-costs for a philosophy in/through the very abundance of new notions and surprise concepts, close to the art of providing answers to concrete questions by resorting to multiplicities, flows, arrangements and connections, and analysing/deconstructing the relationship of desire with reality and capitalism.

The opponents of *Anti-Oedipus*, referred to by Foucault, can be extrapolated in a form/formula conjugated to the perspective he applied to himself – “the political ascetics, the sad militants, the terrorists of theory, those who would preserve the pure order of politics and political discourse. The bureaucrats of the revolution and the civil servants of Truth (...), the pathetic technicians of desire (...), historical fascism, (...) but also the one that challenges us (...), rooted in our behaviour”<sup>21</sup>. The concepts that Deleuze identifies as Gogol-against-Kafka are reconsidered by Foucault – dually – in/through the formula of Marx and Freud.

Deleuze perceives, through the category of a new archivist, the posture of one dedicated to affirmations rather than sentences and phrases, ignoring the latter both vertically and horizontally, in favour of a diagonal-transversal perspective arranged triadically in: the *collateral space* (the statement

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 622-623.

<sup>17</sup> K. Vellodi, "Diagrammatic Thought: Two Forms of Constructivism in C.S. Peirce and Gilles Deleuze", in *Parrhesia*, 19, 2014, pp. 79-95.

<sup>18</sup> G. Deleuze, *Foucault*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, London, 1988.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> M. Foucault, "Preface", in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983, pp. xi-xv.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. xi-xii.

is inseparable from the inherent variant, it does not remain entirely confined in a single system, accepting rules which can be found on the same level as itself); the *correlative space* (the link that the statements maintain with their own subject - object and with their own concepts), respectively the *complementary space* (within which Foucault, Deleuze believes, articulates his political philosophy, accumulating a set of *instructions, political events, practices and economic processes*). If “any institution presupposes the existence of statements such as a constitution, a charter, contracts, records, and entries, utterances refer to an institutional environment necessary for the formation of both the objects appearing in such examples of the utterance, and the subject speaking from this position - for example, the position of the writer in society, the position of the doctor in the hospital or in his office, at any given time, correlated with the new appearance of different objects”<sup>22</sup>). To the objection regarding Foucault's act and manner of perfecting classical analysis based on the context, Deleuze responds with the very novelty of the established criteria, by articulating a phrase without always occupying the same place in the corresponding statement and without reproducing the same particular features, in the sense in which “the context does not explain anything, because its nature varies according to the specific discourse, formation or family of utterances considered”<sup>23</sup>.

This is the relevant node that Deleuze considers decisive in defining groups of utterances and affirmations in the posture of multiplicities, the latter named and particularized by individualizing elements, by blanks and cumulative, repeatable and self-preserving regularities. Because “multiplicity is neither axiomatic nor typological, but topological”, says Deleuze<sup>24</sup>. What becomes operable in the case of Foucault also resides in the launch and concretization of a contrasting archaeology in relation to the techniques of archivists (formalization and interpretation), by creating a new diagonal dimension of non-abstract distribution of points, groups or images with real existence in space<sup>25</sup>. The above-mentioned informal dimension is called a *diagram* by Foucault, understanding by this term-concept not an archive, but a map, an abstract cartography coextensive with the entire social field, a spatio-temporal multiplicity, in the sense that “there are as many diagrams as there are social fields in history”<sup>26</sup>.

Foucault uses the diagram in relation to disciplinary-modern societies, establishing the existence and functioning of evolutionary-intermediate diagrams of transition from one society to another: “(...) the diagram never functions in order to represent a persistent world, but produces a new kind of reality, a new model of truth. It is neither the subject of history, nor does it research history. It makes history by unravelling previous realities and meanings, constituting hundreds of points of emergence or creativity, unexpected conjunctions or improbable continuums. It doubles history with a sense of continuous evolution. Every society has its diagrams (...)”<sup>27</sup>. Deleuze inclusively offers the model of primitive societies, those in which Foucault does not show any direct interest, those that he considers, through existing alliances, as opportune examples of the relationships between force and directly-exercised power. Hence a definitional addition given to the diagram as a map of power relations, travelling from one point to another.

Deleuze's reading is applied to the archivist and cartographer Foucault by targeting, above all, a diffuse locality (power, from Foucault's perspective, is always a local and unstable state); it revalues the very attributes of the intellectual engaged in countering an empowered and dominant system of knowledge production, within which the effects of power demand to be diagrammed, as for Foucault the diagram is a function that is requiredly “detached from any specific use and substance”. The extrapolated meaning of the diagram becomes, for Deleuze, a way of relating to what Foucault called relations of power and its non-stratified distribution strategies<sup>28</sup>. Hence another meaning applied to the diagram, that of transmission or distribution of particular characteristics, also found in the

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<sup>22</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibidem*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibidem*, p., 22.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibidem*, pp. 34.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 35.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibidem*, pp. 72-73.

relationship/ratio that is being established: “Strategies differ from stratifications and diagrams differ from archives”<sup>29</sup>.

A difference of nature is always articulated between the diagram and the archive, in the sense pointed out by Deleuze, according to which, “between the techniques of knowledge and the strategies of power, there is no exteriority, even if they have specific roles and are interconnected based on their difference”<sup>30</sup>.

From the variability of existing combinations between the visible and the articulable, the microphysics of power exposes the relations between forces through an informal and unstratified element, a reason that determines the existence of a functional diagrammatic typology. In the case of Foucault: the *supersensitive diagram* does not overlap with the audiovisual archive; the *disciplinary diagram* replaces the effects of the sovereign regime with an immanent control of the social field; the *pastoral diagram* functions as a relationship between forces or action-directed-towards-another-action. In the endless corpus of diagrams, they always inter-communicate, being themselves non-places, spaces of mutation, a combination/variation between/of randomness and dependency<sup>31</sup>.

*Deleuze on Foucault* provides the former with the tools and resources necessary to accredit the diagram as “coming from the outside, but the outside does not merge with any diagram and instead continues to *draw* new ones. (...) The power diagram shows the particular features of resistance, such as *points, nodes or foci* that in turn act on its layers. (...) Power relations operate entirely within the diagram, while resistances necessarily operate in direct relation to the outside from which the diagrams emerge”<sup>32</sup>.

In itself, Deleuze's approach considers mapping as decisive for Foucault, through the way in which “the archive is doubled by an evolution of forces, by a diagram”<sup>33</sup>, in the pose of superimposed maps, with parts of the whole image being not only interrelated points, but also an accumulation of creativity, change and resistance. From/through the overlap, the latter diagram becomes the most recent (not by chance, when analysing the *detente* of change Deleuze resorts to the moment of 1968 and to the modifications/twists and multiplications of the line), validating with extra meaning the statement that “to write is to draw”<sup>34</sup>, as Foucault is a cartographer!

#### *Instead of Conclusions: Two Views of Diagrams and a Unity of Meaning*

In Deleuze's way of relating to the diagram, there are two perspectives that must be received, both positioned at a distance and deprived of the existence of any relational link.

The first can be located in Deleuze and Guattari's appeal to the diagram (from *A Thousand Plateaus*) this being accredited with the positive valences of a hallmark element of deterritorialization. In itself, this consists in an approach that exposes head-on the existing/persistent dualism positioned between a *plane of consistency – diagrams – abstract machines* and their programs/assemblies, a perspective that converges towards connected knowledge and understanding: stratified territories represent the prerogative of *abstract machines*; deterritorialization/the new amounts to an invented product of the *diagram*, productively reintegrated – in its outer layers – in the circuit.

The second concerns Deleuze's own recourse to Foucault (*About Foucault*) which Deleuze premeditatedly operates with the aim of precisely problematizing the type of argument according to which, by means of the diagram, Foucault identifies and exposes the logic of organization and the distribution of power. In fact, Deleuze departs from the stated intention, that of accepting diagrams as multiple areas of deterritorialization, endowed with the effect of power, in order to accredit with extra meaning the evidence according to which the diagram is a singular force of organization of the entire social field of power.

*Deleuze on Foucault* becomes - here - a decisive act, by positioning itself on the same side of the perspective - the diagram does not represent any superstructural device of vertical organization

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<sup>29</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 74.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 82.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibidem*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 89.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 43.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 44.

of the social, nor is it equivalent to the sum of the concrete ensembles through which it operates, but represents an immanent-nonunifying and orderly, coextensive cause of the totality of the social field.

Without being explicit enough in advocating a type of diagrammatic thinking<sup>35</sup>, Deleuze proposes an open system that he exposes triadically [in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), *Francis Bacon: Logic of Sensation* (1981) and *Foucault* (1986)] and which sums up either the pose of an agent of destruction of the given and a generator of the new, or a map of forces, or even a plus-coded regime, or lines and areas that converge towards new possibilities, or the mechanism that makes power relations work. The symbol-signs no longer represent, for Deleuze, the traces of a thing, but markings of de- and re-territorialization, the diagram being equivalent to the highest point of abstraction, but also of the moment when it becomes real(ity), in the space of meeting with the difference/intensity that makes the diagram an experimentation/experience always in contact with the real.

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<sup>35</sup>Manuel DeLanda, "Deleuze, Diagram, and the Genesis of Form", in: *ANY*, 23, 3 1998, p. 1.