

Matthew Ritchie *Open Diagram*

This assignment will show how to create a simple working diagram of your own personal universe - and how you can share it with others. The project emphasizes how sharing simple visual narratives allows us to change our understanding of the world by identifying and including features of reality that may be invisible to us individually. We will also learn about how this type of world building was historically a widespread form of shared visual art practice.

Materials

Paper, pencils, erasers, access to images of art from three different cultures, brain.

Assignment 1

Begin with a class discussion of the following questions and topics:

- Why do we share our experience of reality?
- How do we share our direct experience of reality?
- What are the benefits and disadvantages of sharing experience and understanding?
- What are the benefits and disadvantages of sharing and understanding an artwork?
- What is the difference between making art and looking at art?
- Can everyone be an artist?
- How much information do you really need to show something?
- What is the simplest form of picture making?
- What are the simplest visual tools?
- Practice making dots, lines, circles, boxes, and arrows.
- Optional: Discuss and show early writing, pictograms, Egyptian hieroglyphics and Cuneiform.
- What is a visual narrative? How does it actually work? What is usually left out of visual narratives?
- Is there an iconic moment, story, or issue that for you sums up how the universe affects your life, or all life? This could be a personal story or a universal one, or even one that made you who you are today. This could be your origin story.
- What is the difference between this story of your life and your actual daily experience of time and space?
- What hidden forces have you left out of each story? (Think about time and space, energy and chance.)



Matthew Ritchie's installations integrating, 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 Bienal, the Venice Architecture Biennale, the Seville Biennale and the Havana Biennale.

His most recent gallery exhibitions in New York, London and Los Angeles—‘Ghost Operator’ (2008) ‘Line Shot’ (2009) and ‘Monstrance’ (2012)—incorporated architectural interventions, performance, and chance based interactive digital projections to explore an alternate history of time. In 2009 he wrote and directed ‘The Long Count’ with music by Aaron & Bryce Dessner, a multimedia song cycle that premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 2009, travelled to the Holland Festival in Amsterdam in 2011 and the

Assignment 2

- Look at a piece of art from three very different cultures.
- Make a list of all the contents of each work you can see: such as colors, symbols, scales, figures, etc for each piece.
- Make a list of the forces involved in understanding the image.
- Describe the space the artist has used to contain and narrate the forces and contents in relation each other.
- Has the artist shown that some things are more important than others? If so, how?
- Draw a diagram of how the contents and forces work together to make an image or story for each work.
- What do the three artworks have in common? What is different in each case? Did everyone understand them in the same way?

Assignment 3

Your turn!

- Think of an important issue in your life.
- Make a list of all the important contents of the issue, using the broadest possible categories such as money, home, nature, etc.
- Make a list of the abstract forces involved in the issue, using the broadest possible categories such as time, energy, emotions, etc.
- If you like you can decide on a visual space the forces and contents are inside – but a blank page is fine.

Here's the hard part!

- Draw a diagram of how the contents and forces work together.
- Imagine a single dimension, a point, for your first content. Label it.
- Add a line. Now add an arrow to the line, it becomes a force vector pulling the content.
- What is it pulling towards?
- Can you imagine another dimension? Go ahead. Add another line, another and another. Now add arrows to all those lines in the direction the forces are pulling the different contents.
- What has been left out? What hidden forces have you left out? (Think about time and space, energy and chance.)
- Put it in! Feel free to reorganize the image as many times as you like. It's your universe!

Barbican Center, London in 2012. In 2009, he also collaborated with noted physicist Lisa Randall and composer Hector Parra to create 'Hypermusic', a projective opera that premiered at the Centre Pompidou, Paris and toured to the Teatre del Liceu, Barcelona, the Kaaithheater, Brussels and the Guggenheim Museum, New York.

In 2008 he created 'The Morning Line,' a large-scale, innovative, traveling, interactive, public architectural structure. Designed in collaboration with New York based architects Aranda Lasch and the Arup Advanced Geometry Unit, and commissioned by Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary, the structure explores the possibility of a visual operating language for the universe, based on the 'epikyrotic' theory of Paul Steinhardt and Neil Turok, and uses that language to create a new form of visual and sonic environment, designed in collaboration with the Music Research Centre of York University to play over 30 site-specific compositions by musicians such as Evan Ziporyn, Lee Renaldo, Thom Willems and Jon 'Jonsi' Birgisson in a unique spatialized soundscape. The Morning Line is currently installed in Vienna.

His work 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 numerous other institutions worldwide; including a permanent large-scale installation at MIT. Awards include the Baloise Art Prize, a National Association of Art Critics award, an ID design award and the Federal Art In Architecture National Honor Award. He has written for Artforum, Flash Art, Art & Text, and the Contemporary Arts Journal and is a contributor to Edge.

He has presented public lectures on numerous subjects including: Einstein & 21st Century Art at the Einstein Centennial Symposium, Berlin; 'Robert Smithson's Influence'

Assignment 4 (optional)

- Pin up all the diagrams together. What is different in each diagram?
- Does everyone understand them in the same way? Did anyone show that some things are more important than others? If so, how?
- Make a list of all the things that are the same. Make a list of all the things that are different.
- Using a large roll of paper or acetates combine all the diagrams into one diagram.
- If the same idea appears in many diagrams – only use it once. Reconnect all the lines that were attached to that one idea to that one point.

This is your shared universe.

- Are some things are more important than others? If so, how?
- How much information do you need to really understand something?
- Draw a smaller diagram of how all the contents and forces work together to make a larger image or story for everyone.
- Is there a hidden rule?

at the Robert Smithson Symposium, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York; 'The Lovborg Memorial Lecture' for PEN American Center at the New School for Social Research, New York; 'Physics, Art & Music' (with Lisa Randall & Hector Parra) at the Digital Life Design Conference, Munich; 'It Starts with a Dot', for 'The Universe Resounds: Kandinsky, Synesthesia & Art', Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York; 'Games Of Chance & Skill' for the Penny Stamps Distinguished Speakers Series, University of Michigan; and 'Superpostional Art' for 'Systems, Process, Art & the Social', MIT, Cambridge. In 2012 he was Artist in Residence at the Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles and is currently Mellon Artist in Residence and Adjunct Professor in the Graduate Visual Arts Program at Columbia University, New York.

Background information

Diagrams are the oldest form of visual communication.

The earliest diagrams, the Jiahu and Vinca symbols date back to the 6th millennium BCE. The diagram is an essential and universal mode of artistic practice all too often ignored or thrown away. 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 drawing in the world is forgotten. 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 Michel 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” (Meillasoux).

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”.

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.

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 Stjernfeldt’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. Stjernfeldt 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 the 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.