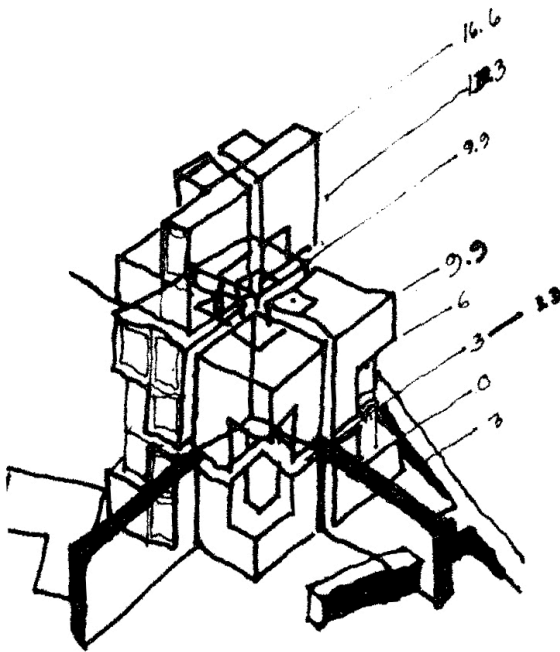


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Hand Outs

**Feints:
The Diagram Peter Eisenman**



Since Brunelleschi's import of perspective to architecture in the 15th century, architectural thought has been dominated by the split between reality, that is, real presence, and representation. This insertion of perspective into architectural discourse has had subtle but lasting effects. For one, it produced a conscious idea of a subject, albeit as a viewing subject in relation to an architectural object. Equally, through the agency of Renaissance painting and its deployment of perspectival architectural backgrounds, painterly conventions came into architecture. Things such as deep space, flat space, and the -like produced that first immanent, as opposed to transcendental, metaphysic. In painting, the split between reality and representation, while present, was deemed to be less thematic because what was painted on a flat canvas was also its reality in presence. The introduction of visual inventions, this immanent metaphysic, has become so natural to architecture that Jacques Derrida

said that architecture was the locus of the metaphysics of presence. The acceptance of this idea has rarely been questioned. But it is precisely the questioning of presence that has made Derrida's work important for architecture. Since the late 1970s, the question of the metaphysics of presence and the hegemony of the visual have been central to my work.

Jasper Johns, in an obituary on Marcel Duchamp in 1968, suggested that it was Duchamp who took art away from the retinal boundaries, which had been established with impressionism, and into a field where language, thought, and vision act upon one another. While the field of the retinal deals with the direct impact of color, texture, and shape on the eye, the retinal is not a primary thematic for architecture. Rather, the optical is to architecture what the retinal is to painting. It is necessary for this discussion to distinguish between the optical, or retinal, and the visual. The optical is dependent on the primary conditions of the image, while the visual searches for other means of recording sensation with the eye other than the optical. The visual is different from the optical in that rather than deal only with surface phenomena, it can also deal with spatial and formal relationships, things which, while first seen, have to be conceptualized. The idea then would be to find a way in the visual to see presence as other than dominated by the optical. Abstraction was one attempt by modernism to undercut opticality by reducing figuration, but, with the social and political failures of modernism in the 1930s, abstraction also lost its power.

Thus, if the subject's relationship to presence is grounded in vision, then one challenge is not to exaggerate this condition via spectacular imagery but to redirect the optical into other aspects of the visual. Enter the diagram.

Currently there seems to be confusion over what a diagram is. This has been brought about as much by architects as it has by their theorists, who, influenced perhaps by Gilles Deleuze's

reading of Francis Bacon's painting as diagrammatic or the idea of the diagram as an abstract machine as elaborated in Deleuze and Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, have transferred these ideas to architecture with varying results. Yet another group of critics, perhaps hostile to the formal implications of Rudolf Wittkower's and Colin Rowe's invocations of the diagram and its formal implications have suggested that the diagram is neither a formal nor indexical instrument. It has been my contention that the diagram, while not necessarily iconic, has spatial and material consequences in architecture that are different from other disciplines. Among other things, the diagram attempts to displace presence as *prima fascia* opticality, that is, to displace the idea that what we see is truth, and thus to find a visual alternative to the optical. Once of the motivations of the diagram is to provide an intermediary condition between presence, image, and idea; between the past and the present.

One challenge for architecture has always been to define its own internal discourse as different from other visual media, from painting, sculpture, film, etc. This has become even more critical today, with the saturation of print and visual media dedicated to the 30-second sound-cum-visual byte. Architecture, in an attempt to compete with this proliferation, has become more easy, more shaped, and spectacular. Nearly, if one cannot compete on media's ground, the challenge is not to return to the static, classical imagery of architecture's past but rather to find another way to deal with the problem of presence, of the need to be somewhere, a being there, which is neither grounded in phenomenology nor in Heideggerian being in time.

A diagram derives from the context of a site, program, or history. A diagram does not necessarily exist *a priori* in any project. In this sense, it is not like a type which has a fixed relationship to form, function, and history. There are two kinds of work on diagrams. One is theoretical and analytic, the other is operational and synthetic. The former takes existing building and analyzes them to find diagrams that animate these buildings. The latter is something teased out of a program or site that permits these conditions to be seen in a different way. The diagram is both a form of text, a tissue of traces, and an index of time. A diagram is to architecture as a text is to a narrative. The diagram is formed but it may not be formal.

My reading of Le Corbusier's Domino diagram opened up what seemed to be an early manifestation of the five points of architecture as something beyond the usual reading of its tectonic implications. Equally, my analysis opened the diagram to its own internal formal characteristics, which, while, they may not have been thematic for Le Corbusier at the time,

nevertheless influenced any reading of it.

While Charles Sanders Pierce thought that the diagram should have a visual similitude to its object, and therefore iconic in its being, in many ways the diagram, if it is to be an intermediary in the optical, must forgo a visual thematic. While, a diagram will always have some visual reference to its object, the fact that this visual reference is not thematic is what is at issue in the diagram. In my work, the diagram has been a template for invention. It is neither a type form, nine squares, or a formal similitude, that is, the diagram as the object itself. The exhibition demonstrates the evolution of the diagram in both my analytic and projected work. This work began with my Ph.D. thesis in 1963. "The formal Basis of Modern Architecture", and continued with my study on two of Terragni's buildings, the Casa del Fascio and the Casa Giuliani Frigerio. My project work paralleled this research. Diagrams were the basis for the process of the early houses, and as the work increased in scale and complexity, so did the diagrams.

A diagram is not a plan. For example, both Piranesi's Campo Marzio and his Collegio Romano appear to be plans, but in my analysis, they are perhaps more importantly diagrams. In the case of the Collegio, one must ask how it is possible for something to be axial and symmetrical in a classical senses and yet have no possible function in that regard. Equally, the Campo Marzio is a tissue of impossibility with no single time but multiple times and scales as the basis of the work. Other such analyses have open up other architects, from Palladio to Moretti, to show the diagrammatic possibilities for reading other architects whose work has traditionally been assumed to be based on optical.