

what is a diagram (for a sign)?

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THE SIGN AS SELECTION

Sign (*def.*): A *sign* is the selection of a set against a substratum, and a suite of diagrams enacting the processes accompanying the selection; ex. free water can be given by the sign {water, o\$} and diagrams expressing the social, environmental and existential effects of free water on a wider substratum of relatively stable things and ideas.

When it defines the sign as a selection of a set, process philosophy comes up against a deep problem.¹ Isn't a set a fixed entity, a collection of things?

The first stage in answering this objection rests on describing selection more precisely: first, it is a *selecting*, an ongoing process; second, this selecting is accompanied by changes in the set and its substratum (everything not included in the set); third, these changes are variations in the intensities of relations in and around all elements.

For example, in a tale of the desecration of a hallowed emblem by a foreign tribe, the set might be {our beloved pennant, fire, the unspeakable ones}. The set is both a name for the desecration and the naming of a process where a tightening—an increasingly intense—knot is drawn around the flag, the evil medium of fire and those whose name cannot be spoken.

In turn, the strands of this knot extend to all other things. Some are sadly familiar, in the way friendship, forgiveness and reason are cut loose and distanced, and in the parallel way hatred, revenge and folly are clutched close to the knot. Others are unexpected: cooking traditions are changed by nationalist myths (*freedom fries...*) and distant people become friends due to a mutual foe (*my enemy's enemy...*).

There are philosophical, historical and scientific justifications for the complexity of the processes in the sign, in ideas of ontological plurality, evidence of historical diversity and work on complex systems. However, this is a *speculative* philosophy. It has many influences and fields to test itself upon, but its formal core is proposed rather than deduced. Though the philosophy has wide evidential resources, its initial moves are deliberately speculative; not “it is the case that” but rather “let’s entertain this suggestion.”

Since any element can be selected into a set, since this selection of elements takes place against an underlying substratum, and since the selecting alters intensities of relations in and around all elements, the variations of intensity are in principle limitless in the relations they affect and in the elements they touch upon. Nothing can be excluded from the operation of the selection of a set and no element is left unchanged by the intense relations determining it as process.

We get an intuitive sense of this principle of non-exclusion from the unexpected connection of things and the surprising reach of historical events. The selection of a particular animal into an emblem in the distant past has effects on our behaviour towards animals in the present, in reverence for them, or hatred (the wise owl; the treacherous snake).

At first glance, the appeal to intense relations and changing elements is self-contradictory. If relations are between elements, then relations can change but the elements should not, otherwise relations will always be between different elements, with no grounds for comparison. This objection is based on the mistaken assumption that relations must hold between fixed terms. We should instead see relations as holding relatively within changing networks of further relations. In the sign, fixed elements are replaced by relative stability among changing relations.

An element is a zone of stability, rather than a settled being with a given identity. When relations are defined as “in and around” elements, this should be taken as meaning elements are neighbourhoods of relative stability formed by multiple relations. These relations are ever-changing and any element is a multiplicity of

stabilising and destabilising processes.

The selection of a set is therefore a way of naming a sign and drawing out its most distinct, or relatively stable, elements. When the sign is defined as the selection of a set against a substratum, this means the selected elements appear more distinctly among a multiplicity of varying intensities of relations.

There are risks in connecting stability to distinctness. Stability recalls relatively secure spatial location, but since there is a multiplicity of relations there is no good reason to privilege spatial ones. There is also stability in time, colour, genetic lines, heat, malleability, speed, spin and so on. It would be therefore more accurate to say that stability is relative to anything that can be said to increase and decrease in intensity across a series of changing relations. In turn, this can be formalised into anything that can be expressed by a verb and a qualifier of intensity; *to spin faster around a slowing core*.

Multiplicity and intensity are the special characteristics of process signs. This multiplicity is not of beings but of changing intensities of relations allowing neighbourhoods and directions to be identified and worked upon. Think of every sign as the turmoil of river water after it has passed a bridge, with different currents, whirlpools, eddies and rapids, each of which can in turn be investigated for its own internal multiplicity.

Intensity is a continuous change in the degree of something: growing, shrinking, increasing, decreasing, tightening, loosening, accelerating, decelerating, condensing, rarefying and so on. The rapids after the bridge are dynamic. There is an accelerating centre and slowing edges; stones are bending parts of the stream into new shapes and jetting spume upwards, while downward suction is pulling water to the murky bed.

When historians study the sign of a desecration in order to trace its effects through populations and ideas, they name a sign by selecting its elements: “It was the burning of that treasured pennant attributed to this tribe” becomes {Fire, pennant of the just ones, the unspeakable ones}. The selected set is not the point of historical argument, though. The changing intensities in the relations around elements of sign and substratum allow the sign to be associated with other processes. This provides material for explanation: “punishment by fire can be traced back to the tale of the burning of the pennant which brought fire into an ideology of revenge and purification.”

The historical naming of a sign is not simply the identification of an objective state of affairs or of a recognisable idea. Instead, it is to trace multiplicities of changes in intensity around many elements—of attraction and repulsion, distance and proximity, passion and disinterest. The coining of the sign is a critical act, because it is a free selection of elements and a speculative suggestion of connections between changing intensities and processes of stabilisation and destabilisation.

This does not mean that creation and critical power are necessarily good. The images on the front pages of tabloid newspapers are signs, with their own intensive variations and new zones of stabilisation and destabilisation designed around changing intensities of ignorance, fear and hatred. The process sign is not proof or argument on its own.

The selection of a set allows new signs into the debate (“What if a false accusation of desecration was crucial to the cycle of revenge?”). The dynamic and interconnected multiplicity of the sign allows for an unlimited range of creative and critical explanatory arguments (“Increasing proximity of fire to punishment in the sign explains the increase in house burning and the subsequent flight of populations.”)

Process philosophy is concerned with the significance of dynamic processes rather than with the current states of things. The former indicates the changing dependencies of a field: “the cult of revenge grew in significance.” The latter prioritises an accurate description of a state at a given time. The fundamental hypothesis of speculative process philosophy is that static representation is always a false picture without a sense of the movements transforming it in an open-ended manner. The sign as selected set is process because it is a selecting of neighbourhoods that are more distinct against a substratum of multiplicities of relations changing in intensity. These changing intensities are enacted on diagrams.

SPECULATIVE AND PRAGMATIC DIAGRAMS

Diagrams for process signs express dynamic changes in intensities and the relatively stable neighbourhoods and directions associated with the selection of a sign. They communicate a combination of zones, flows and patterns of increases and decreases. For example, as diagrams, weather maps combine place, many different kinds of directions, changing intensity of temperature, wind speed and air pressure, alongside weather patterns such as the spin of a hurricane or the blocking effect of a high pressure ridge.

Meteorological maps are also a good way of understanding the infinite inclusions and multiplicities of diagrams for signs. A map can connect its processes to biological and social ones, or to suggestions about as apparently incongruous links as high pressure to road rage, or heavy rain to migrations half a world away.

If signs and diagrams have a connection to things in the world and a logical coherence, does this not limit them in quite strict ways? Aren't some signs impossible and some diagrams false? When a meteorologist coined the sign Ridiculously Resilient Ridge, it mattered whether there was such a phenomenon over the North-Eastern Pacific and it mattered what claims were made for its behaviour and effects on rainfall. When a map shows changes around a place, isn't that place fixed and verifiable?

The process philosophy situates general claims about truth and validity outside the sign, as stipulations over it. A stipulation is a code or law that imposes limits on the selection of signs and on their diagrams. The complete account of any sign should include such stipulations. In contrast to stipulations, claims about accuracy and significance of diagrams for the sign are pragmatic considerations. They are to be debated between different selections of signs, their suites of diagrams and the different stipulations making claims over them.

The selection of the set is independent of any general stipulation except one: selection is undetermined. Anything can be included in a sign in any combination. Diagrams are also free of all stipulations other than those implied by the definition of signs. The point of the process definition is to maximise the critical and creative potential of signs. To be able to challenge established laws and codes, the sign must be as flexible and open as possible.

As an extension to the critical and creative role of signs, one of the main aims of the process philosophy is to be inclusive of all signs. It should be possible to define any sign in current usage as a process sign. Signs of art, signs in science, signs in nature, all the signs of history, visual signs and linguistic ones, all have process definitions. How can this be, if some of those signs are not consistent with the ideas of process?

Undetermined selection, suites of diagrams and stipulations of the sign are designed to allow for signs inconsistent with the process sign. It is possible to include other types of sign within the process sign by selecting them into a set or by situating them on a diagram. Since each diagram for a sign is in principle all-inclusive, anything can be shown on the diagram, even if it is a very low degree of

intensity.

The requirement for suites of diagrams implies that any diagram is but one suggestion that must invite others. Diagrams therefore interact critically with each other and change signs as they do so. This is why the sign is defined by an open suite of diagrams, rather than a single sufficient one. There cannot be such a diagram.

However, simply to include static signs and theories in a process sign is unsatisfactory, because it does not allow for their full force as contradicting the idea of process. There is therefore a third manner in which process signs can allow for non-process signs and theories. This is by listing stipulations that set out codes or laws opposed to the process suggestion alongside the process sign, in order to allow for critical debate with them. Such debates around signs can take account of scientific theories that contradict a sign and its diagrams.

Discussions about the respective worth and validity of process signs and stipulations over them are built into the definition of the sign. The speculative process philosophy is therefore doubly hypothetical. First, it proposes an overall speculative definition of the sign. Second, it is then subservient to wider critical discussion around the merit of each process sign and its suite of diagrams in relation to stipulations that contradict them.

The form of diagrams must fit with the definition of the sign as selection and with a pragmatist approach to the practice of defining particular signs and their diagrams. In turn, the study of a sign should encompass its critical and creative place in wider discussions; in particular, in terms of stipulations denying different aspects of the sign.

A diagram for a process sign is subjected to the following constraints:

1. The diagram will enact changing neighbourhoods, directions and intensities.
2. The elements of the selected set for the diagram will appear on it as neighbourhoods or directions.
3. Nothing will be excluded from a diagram. Exclusions only appear in external stipulations.
4. Diagrams will be continuous, but discontinuities can be added as stipulations.

Diagrams should accord with the following pragmatic principles:

1. A diagram should be a suggestion about the processes implied by the selection of a sign.
2. Each diagram should register its place in a suite of alternative diagrams.
3. A complete account of a sign should take note of stipulations that deny or limit it.

These constraints and principles give a great deal of leeway in terms of type, style and sophistication for diagrams. The diagram is a situated practical and political challenge. Diagrams can vary from the very simple to the highly complex and from the tentative to the nearly complete. A diagram could be a few points and some arrows, or a manifold digital computer simulation with detailed instructions and commentary. The best approach depends on the sign and its pragmatic situation.

RECENT WORK ON PROCESS DIAGRAMS

Simon O’Sullivan’s application of diagrams to art and philosophy in *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation* posits the link between diagrams and process after having made a claim for the priority of process: “... any subject comes after, or is secondary to, a given process that is primary.”² Stable objects and subjects are neighbourhoods and directions of stabilisation, rather than unchanging objects in their own right.

O’Sullivan connects the idea of the priority of process to diagrams:

[...] the diagram often leads the synthesis rather than merely illustrating a synthesis already made (it begins as an illustration... then spirals out...). It operates at a different speed to the discursive, and certainly in a more experimental manner. Diagrams are like fictions in this sense. They produce thought. I mean this in two senses: (1) [...] they often run ahead of the discursive work like a forward hurled probe [...]; and (2) they operate as a map for thinking life more broadly, for spotting passageways, openings and lines of flight.³

He insists on the creative and process-driven aspect of diagrams. They aren’t fixed representations, but rather illustrations that go beyond themselves, they “spiral out” and make syntheses; enacting them, rather than reporting on them.

The reference to the fictional quality of diagrams should not be taken in the negative sense of fiction as opposed to reality. Fiction must be seen as critically and creatively valuable; effective when set alongside claims to truth and reality. A diagram is real because it interacts with other realities.

The diagram is a singular pragmatic intervention. It puts codes and laws into play, but does not operate according to them. Diagrams construct critical thought in the communication of dynamic prompts and sensations. They add a critical and speculative dimension to thought and to the sign. As O’Sullivan says, they are a kind of “speculative fiction.”

Speculative fictions in signs and their diagrams encompass and encourage wide critical and creative approaches to law-driven stipulations. The claims of a stipulation over signs can be included in a process sign and hence mapped as dynamic interventions: produced and producing changes across a multiplicity.

This means that semiology re-establishes its critical stance with respect to the sciences. It is not to deny the sciences or to restrict their ambit, but rather to insert them into a broad debate about ideas and processes that are overlooked by a given set of sciences at a given time. The arts and humanities should then not be seen as an alternative sphere or as a claim to a different realm to the sciences. They are instead a way of working alongside the sciences across all topics: neither servant nor master, more of a troublesome friend.

In *Post-Continental Philosophy: an Outline*, John Mullarkey defines a similar process function for the diagram: “The philosophical diagram works as a drawing, a process, a procedure, a temporary moment in between; not in the shape of a thing but the outline of a process (of thinking). Hence, dia-grammes should always be seen as moving forms, whether or not they are static.”⁴ The point is to move beyond things and towards process. Mullarkey adds the ideas of the in-between and of motion even in static representation. I have built these ideas into the speculative and serial nature of diagrams for signs, through intensity as change in relation, and through the definition of stasis as relative stability.

O’Sullivan and Mullarkey are Deleuze scholars. Alongside Peirce’s pragmatism, Deleuze’s philosophy has done much to bring the concept of the diagram into philosophical work over recent years. Kamini Vellodi has studied the connections and differences between Peirce’s and Deleuze’s definitions of the sign as vehicle for thought. She also criticises Mullarkey’s analysis of the diagram in Deleuze.

According to Vellodi, Mullarkey misunderstands “the diagram as a visual map/‘graphic image.’” He therefore mistakenly describes Deleuze’s diagram “as a ‘philosophical drawing’ ... [that] takes both a transcendent view (representing immanence) while also remaining immanent.”⁵ There are therefore two perceived faults: overemphasis upon the visual and assigning a transcendent representational function to the diagram.

Mullarkey’s definition is taken to be wrong because it returns Deleuze to transcendence, whereas for Vellodi “it is precisely for the sake of a thought of immanence liberated from any ‘transcendent view’ [that] Deleuze conceives of the diagram as a map of new concepts...”⁶ I think this is a misinterpretation of Mullarkey’s use of the term drawing. He says “as” a drawing, which does not mean *always* as a drawn representation, but rather that *like* a drawing the diagram works as a process between two further processes.

Mullarkey is justified in using the term drawing, since there are many instances of drawings of diagrams by Deleuze (a drawn diagram of Foucault, diagrams of other philosophers in *What is Philosophy?*, and diagrams of processes in *A Thousand Plateaus* and *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*). This does not imply that diagrams must be drawn. Mullarkey describes diagrams as moving forms, which should be read as “forms that move” in the double sense of introducing novel dynamics and affects into processes. The important thing is movement through some kind of form, rather than the representation of movement in the visual form.

There is a difference here concerning the role of transcendence in process. Mullarkey and O’Sullivan allow for a role of what we might call remnants and intimations of representation in the diagram. This means that, even for Deleuze, diagrams can have representations in them (a house without windows) but that the diagram will introduce intense processes of change which bring in transformations beyond known and established patterns (movement between the floors of the house).

A diagram can act as a line of escape to the radically new without having to expunge all transcendence and representation from it. The diagram can only enact movement by taking risks with remnants of transcendence, from the things it seeks to change, and by taking risks with novel intimations of transcendence in the directions of change. Suspended transcendence is a necessary and risky vehicle for the explanation and communication of process. The diagram must not be directed towards perfect representation but rather to the disruption of the

representations it has to take recourse to.

In the diagram, there is therefore a blend of temporary, suspended, transcendence and the intense events engulfing it. This is why my definition of the diagram has intense relations, neighbourhoods of relative stability, and selected elements. The priority in terms of process lies with intensities that undo the tendency to representative and ideal stability of the neighbourhoods and elements.

The exact nature of Deleuze's diagrams is the basis for different interpretations around which sources and which aspects of them are taken as the most important ones (among *The Logic of Sensation*, *A Thousand Plateaus*, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* or *Foucault*). It matters where the boundaries of the diagram lie in each of Deleuze's definitions; for example, with the "pure" diagram or with its effects on figures and forms.

Vellodi's description of the differences between Peirce and Deleuze is helpful for understanding the different roles played by the diagram and for showing the importance of an engagement with Peirce, but it is also too stark in describing their opposition. She points out that Peirce and Deleuze situate the diagram within a thinking process. That's right, but only if thought is defined in a very wide manner and if it is not exclusively about thinking.

She then distinguishes contrasting thought processes: "thought as a process of discipline, regulation and control that reasoning subjects enact (Peirce), and thought as violent encounter that happens to us in the groundless encounter with difference (Deleuze)." Peirce has a logical normativity and an aim towards consistent truth for his diagrams. However, these need not be strongly associated with discipline, regulation and control, since they also have aspects of experimentation, innovation and open debate.

It is not necessary to emphasise the role of reasoning subjects in thought for Peirce. It is also the case that subjects are gripped and changed by the sign and by the diagram as sign. On the other hand, it is too extreme to isolate the idea of a groundless encounter for thought in Deleuze, since any encounter requires repetition and variation as well as difference. There is a role for pure difference, independent of representation, but it is an abstract and incomplete one.

Vellodi distinguishes destructive thought and thought about the possible: "thought as grounded in the possibilities of thought as it already knows and recognises itself, and as the conditioning of a possible future continuous with its present

form (Peirce), and thought as a creative and violent destruction of thought in its present form for the sake of a new image of a thought without image (Deleuze).”⁸ This contrast is again too great.

Peirce’s pragmatism can ground extraordinarily different ideas and knowledge on the basis of new diagrams. It is not plausible to think of new scientific discoveries such as the double-helix as “continuous” with a present form and as allowing thought to recognise itself across scientific revolutions. Diagrams can take thought a long way from any image it might have of itself. His pragmatism is consistent with paradigm shifts that do not depend on continuity of past and future.

Finally, Vellodi draws a distinction between different kinds of pragmatic experimentation: “for the sake of the determination of real effects through their conception (Peirce), and [...] as the transformation of the existing state of liveable affairs in the genesis of the hitherto unthinkable new that shatters the experience of continuity as lived time (Deleuze).”⁹ Peirce was an expert cartographer. It is possible to see mapping as a kind of conservative continuity, but his pragmatism is more open to the revolutionary sense of novel maps and the way in which they can transform world views radically and with far-reaching and unexpected effects. In maps, the sign “nec plus ultra” at the Straits of Gibraltar gave way to shockingly new worlds, as the Atlantic was explored and charted.

This means that there is greater continuity between Deleuze’s and Peirce’s pragmatisms. It does not follow from concepts of pure difference and from the destructive experience of the new that Deleuze’s pragmatism is merely violence or involves shear breaks with the past. On the contrary, his concept of a diagram implies continuities across changing processes and these temper the violence of new encounters with a more modulated experimental practice.

This temperance is crucial to understanding the cautious aspects of Deleuze and Guattari’s experimentation. The difference with Peirce is then not about extreme novelty in pragmatism but rather about its specific practices. It is a matter of the structure of pragmatic thought; in particular, the place of logic and the nature of hierarchies of methods in pragmatic experimentation.

DELEUZE AND THE “FOUCAULT” DIAGRAMS

In his book on Michel Foucault, Deleuze defines the diagram as “non-formed dimension, as shapeless dimension.”¹⁰ As process, a diagram does not unfold according to a pattern, or admit to any form, or take on any specific shape; it

cannot be identified by them. This claim relates to ideas of pure immanence and the opposition between sedentary and nomadic distributions from *Difference and Repetition*. A diagram is a multiplicity of processes that cannot be taken to conform to recognised measures and identities.

The meaning of “cannot” is very important here. It implies that the processes do not conform to prior shapes, but also that they will not conform in future. We can think of maps as representations with specific content, where an external scale holds true for all parts of the map and for the contents. There is a prior shape and form for any object on the map, when it is not thought as diagram.

In a more abstract sense, there are many examples of forms that operate like such scales, whether it is the Kantian categories; or the metric scales we apply to standard maps; or, in the case of conventional readings of Hegel and of Peirce, a form of logic and a direction that apply in principle to every diagram and every process, as a prior form of spirit, or of thought.

Against these common images, Deleuze defines distinctness as emerging and disappearing with each diagram. So form is not a prior and independent dimension, nor a recognised identity, but rather a fleeting stability produced by movement on the diagram and then lost with the very thing giving rise to it. When I wrote of fleeting representations on diagrams earlier, it was as such transitory patterns of relative stability.

A number of objections to this definition of the diagram allow for a deeper understanding of its potential and significance:

1. How can a diagram claim to escape prior frames and patterns, if they exist alongside it and can therefore lay claim to it? For example, a drawing might claim to be contained strictly in its own world, but if it is surrounded by a wider general frame, why shouldn't that frame apply to it?
2. If a diagram must represent already known entities such as objects, subjects, borders, aims and ideas, how can it avoid being subjected to the scales and forms that apply to them? For example, if the diagram contains well understood objects, then don't scientific laws pertaining to the object also apply in the diagram?
3. Once a diagram has been given, why can't we discover its patterns and thereby generalise from them, not only for how a particular diagram works but also for others of similar form? While a diagram might introduce new movements, once these are understood they can be assigned permanent,

or semi-permanent, pattern through rational deduction, or inductively.

Deleuze's answer to the first objection is that each diagram is "coextensive with the whole social field."¹¹ This claim must be understood in a special way. We could think that a map coextensive with a field would correspond perfectly to the elements of the field; at the limit, this would be the perfect map imagined by Borges, where the map is the world's double. This is exactly what Deleuze is trying to avoid. He puts this negatively in terms of archives: "The diagram is no longer the audio or visual archive."¹²

Coextension is not correspondence, but rather transformation across a full extension. As novel process, the diagram is coextensive with the whole of the social field. This means that the diagram is not a limited entity existing alongside other forms which can lay claim to it. Instead, each diagram implicates or folds in all things and directions on the social field. It is for this reason that I have defined the diagram for a sign as without limit or exclusion. A sign implicates everything.

Since they are not in perfect correspondence, the diagram is abstracted from the social field. As process, it is independent from some things and transformative of others. Coextension must be understood not in terms of correspondence between places and parts—form to form—but rather as a process around those forms—a kind of machining: "the diagram is an abstract machine." The diagram makes something new:

Defining itself through non-formal functions and matter, the diagram bypasses every formal distinction between content and expression, between a discursive formation and a non-discursive one. It's a machine that is almost mute and almost blind, even though it is a machine that makes sight and speech.¹³

As shown in the final section, below, this is a reprise of ideas about content, expression and diagram from the discussion of Hjelmslev in *A Thousand Plateaus*. We shouldn't think of the world outside the diagram as its content. Nor should we think of the diagram as expressing something about that world. We shouldn't think of the diagram as a discursive representation of a world other than discourse. The reference to muteness and blindness is designed to emphasise the independence of the machine. It does not conform to the things it makes.

The diagram is a machine that constructs new ways of seeing and speaking. Against paradigmatic examples of diagrams, the diagram shouldn't be thought of as a simplified picture, for instance of the parts of the human body. Nor should it be thought of as a rational representation. It is not an explanation of an observed phenomenon, like the instructions for a mechanism.

It is because the diagram is a construction of the new that it cannot be reduced to a pre-existing transcendent frame. To the second objection, Deleuze answers that the diagram machines or constructs itself in ways that are novel and resistant to established orders. Each diagram is a new machining of the whole world. In the process philosophy of signs, the idea is extended into the claim that each selected sign machines a new world from the old. The diagrams for the sign enact this process.

The precise meaning of the new is very important here. The new should not be defined as relative novelty, based on a limited recombination of some parts. It is exactly the opposite. The diagram as new event makes everything different and new in multiple ways. This is why the process definition of the sign gives the selection of the characteristic set of the sign as a transformation of multiple intense relations in and around all things.

The idea of a machine is very close to some of the traditional functions of a diagram, but where these should not be seen as repetitive commands, but rather ways to make the new. This is why Deleuze and Guattari oppose language as order-words, commands demanding a matching act, and abstract machines, diagrams that create the new.

We must distinguish sedentary distribution, such as oft-repeated assembly instructions for a mass-produced flat-pack cupboard, and a nomadic diagram, such as a sketch drawn to explain a novel and transformative idea to an accomplice. The difference is between commands, such as "Go exactly through steps A to C," and whispered promises, "This is our plan for the heist of the century, for the fair society to come."

In Deleuze's nomadic sense, the diagram is uncertain and innovative. It operates in fields in order to change them, rather than copying them for easy reproduction. There is a revolutionary aspect to this diagram, challenging established order like the plot for a revolt. This is why Deleuze says content and expression are not appropriate for the diagram and why inside and outside are mistaken categories for it. Diagrams are working on the things they fleetingly represent, but only to

change them beyond the forms of that old order: “The diagram never functions to bring together a pre-existing world. It produces a new type of reality, a new model of truth.”¹⁴

For Deleuze, the making works through forces: “In a diagram forces work on other forces.” Instead of an immobile picture we have forces in and through the diagram. We should therefore think of a diagram as pushing and pulling, shaping and cutting, stamping and flattening, funnelling and spreading, accelerating and decelerating.

There are many diagrams because of the many ways forces can come together and be articulated: “diagrams vary in their relation of forces.”¹⁵ This multiplicity is also a facet of each diagram, because even if they only have a few forces, they extend without limit to the whole of the social field: “If there are many diagrammatical functions and much material, it is because every diagram is a spatio-temporal multiplicity. But it is also because there are as many diagrams as historical social fields.”¹⁶ There are many diagrams and each diagram is irreducibly multiple.

We can think of diagrams as battle plans or sketches for new constructions, but Deleuze is most concerned with kinds of historical diagrams, where societies are machined—like Foucault’s articulation of disciplinary forces, or Deleuze’s diagram for societies of control. This is not history as record but rather history as critical intervention: “Making history by undoing preceding realities and signification, constituting many points of emergence or creativity, unexpected conjunctions and improbable continuities. Overtaking history with its becoming.”¹⁷ It is the untimely and creative history of Foucault’s happy positivist: true to the facts by showing how they are transformed and articulated.

The irreducible multiplicity of diagrams and their becoming come together in Deleuze’s answer to the objection that it must be possible to reduce diagrams to some kind of transcendent order after they have been given. This is why Deleuze speaks of an undoing and constituting in the diagram. These are on going and uncertain processes of becoming; “Points of emergence,” “conjunctions” and “continuities” happen in diagrams. Diagrams are open-ended events rather than states.

Deleuze’s diagram of Foucault’s work includes organised archives or strata that might make us think we could systematise it, but then lines of becoming, fissures, movements and transformations intervene on the strata. These events turns history as record into a creation of truth, where truth is no longer fact or

coherence, but rather effective creation—resistant to atomisation as fact or to reduction as coherence.

This explains why diagrams for signs are never unique, but rather interventions suggesting the intense multiplicities accompanying the selection of a sign. The diagram takes its place in a suite of diagrams, with no rules or laws for the suite, no way of reducing it to a systematic series. Instead, there is a play or competition of diagrams.

Diagrams for a sign transform and challenge one another. Like a tumble of dialogue in a well-written play, each new statement changing the status and power of earlier ones, and open to a later retort: “The diagram is deeply unstable or fluid, ceaseless mixing materials and functions in order to constitute mutations. Finally, every diagram brings together many societies and is in becoming.”¹⁸

The diagram for a sign is a multiplicity in becoming. The multiplicity brings together changes in intensity relating different neighbourhoods of greater and lesser stability. The changes can be represented as directions and the neighbourhoods can be represented as points or zones, but this is not necessary. As creative suggestion, each diagram enters into critical relation with other diagrams by implying transformations and inconsistencies in them. As Deleuze says, quoting Foucault: “I have only ever written fictions...’ But fictions have never produced greater truth and reality.”¹⁹

Since a diagram is always a non-systematic process of becoming, systems, codes and laws are given, either, as internal to the sign, if they are subject to its transformation, or, as external to it, if they imply the diagram can be reduced to an ordered system. There is therefore a deep opposition to some of the fundamental tenets of structuralism, around the priority of a well-ordered logical structure for the sign.

ON THE PRIORITY OF BECOMING OVER STRUCTURE IN THE SIGN: A RESPONSE TO HJELMSLEV

The order of priority of structure and process is a problem of ontology and a problem of method. Ontologically, it is about the definition of the sign. Is it better to define the sign as depending on a prior structure or as resistant to structure as shown in its dynamic diagrams? Methodologically, the problem is about the approach to particular signs. Should we prioritise general structures in the description of a sign, or should we seek out singular processes as resistant to

general structures?

In terms of the role of diagrams in signs, these questions translate into two further questions. Should the sign be defined as incomplete, unless it comprises a diagram of its dynamic processes as resistant to external stipulations? Should each sign be described through diagrams which emphasise processes that depart from given structures?

Louis Hjelmslev's structural linguistics give answers to both problems in ways that run counter to the definition of the process sign. His methodological approach is about testing hypotheses about general structures for language. The conclusions to the tests confirm those hypotheses and the overall methodology is explicitly opposed to process: "It is the aim of linguistic theory to test, on what seems a particularly inviting object, the thesis that a process has an underlying system—a fluctuation an underlying constancy."²⁰

This methodological commitment is driven by epistemological and logical reasons. Hjelmslev wants a science of language and his ideas around such a science are dominated by principles of logical consistency: "The description shall be free of contradiction (self-consistent), exhaustive, and as simple as possible. The requirement of freedom from contradiction takes precedence over the requirement of exhaustive description. The requirement of exhaustive description takes precedence over the requirement of simplicity."²¹ A science of language should be consistent above all. It should then apply to all linguistic phenomena. Finally, it should aim to be as simple as possible, that is, as minimal in the number and complexity of its terms as possible. The proliferation of speculative diagrams determined pragmatically is anathema to Hjelmslev's methodological principles.

The negative impulse behind Hjelmslev's theory is a deep suspicion of subjectivism and of *a priori* rejections of systematic sciences of language. He associates such rejections with pleas for language as a process immune by its very nature to scientific systematisation: "Voices raised beforehand against such an attempt in the field of humanities, pleading that we cannot subject to scientific analysis man's spiritual life and the phenomena it implies without killing that life and consequently allowing our object to escape consideration, are merely aprioristic, and cannot restrain science from the attempt."²² To claim that spheres of human activity are not open to scientific investigation, because they cannot in principle be captured by scientific method, is a mere prejudice unless it is backed up by proof through argument and evidence.

For Hjelmslev, scientific investigation arrives at a systematic account of language and signs:

... a language is primarily something different, namely a system of elements appointed to occupy certain definite places in the chain, to contract certain definite relations to the exclusion of certain others. These elements can be used, in conformity with the rules that govern them, to form signs. The number of elements and the relational possibilities of each element are laid down once and for all in the linguistic structure.²³

This structuralism takes elements and their systematic combinations as prior to process in the strong sense of determining it and as immune from the variability of its processes. Processes leading to changes in languages and differences between them depend upon combinations of elements that must follow rules which are themselves independent of those processes.

Against Hjelmslev's defence of prior structures, the process sign and its diagram are defined as undoing stipulations, defined as codes and rules imposed over the sign, and as free from any intrinsic rules, other than speculative ones setting out the priority of process. So nothing is laid down "once and for all" and even main definitions are speculative. Instead of pre-given linguistic possibilities, limited by the number, type and structural rules for elements, the process sign is always a speculative and pragmatic challenge to pre-set limits.

In their notes and remarks on Hjelmslev's science of language, Deleuze and Guattari praise him for moving away from the dominance of the coupling of signifier and signified in linguistics. This is because he replaces the signifier and the signified in the sign by expression and content. These are "functives" which are two inseparable aspects of a single function: "... an expression functive and a content functive, a function, divided into two functives relating expression and content: The sign is, then—paradoxically as it may seem—a sign for a content-substance and a sign for an expression substance. It is in this sense that the sign can be said to be a sign for something."²⁴

The important thing is that those functives are arbitrary in relation to the definition of which one is content and which one is expression: "Hjelmslev's strength is to have conceived of the form of expression and the form of content as two entirely relative variables on one and the same plane, as 'functives of one and the same function.'"²⁵ So long as the naming is consistent, the labels can be reversed. This means that the idea of the sign as "sign for" something gives way to the idea that

the sign is the coming together of two arbitrarily assigned “for” processes relating two sets of elements.

We should no longer search for the signifier in a language and then seek to discover the signified. Instead, the method is first to seek out elements which operate as functives, as “for” things, in each of the sets, then to organise them into as minimal a structure as possible, and then to pair the two sets through these elements: “We shall call the entities that are inventoried at each stage elements. In respect of the analysis we give the following refined formulation of the principle of reduction: Each analysis (or each analysis complex) in which functives are registered with a given function as basis for analysis shall be so made that it leads to the registration of the lowest possible number of elements.”²⁶

The point is that we are not looking for things that look like a meaning or a placeholder for a meaning, or a signified and a signifier. Instead, we are looking for the most minimal structure of elements that can take on the role of expression for content and the role of content for expression. The search is then purely formal. “Can this be a content or expression functive?” replaces the questions “Is this a signifier?” and “What does it signify?”

Why would this approach not count as a process approach to language, since the functives are processes? Why is it opposed in principle to a diagrammatical approach? Here is Deleuze and Guattari’s answer: “This advance towards a diagrammatic conception of the abstract machine is, however, counteracted by the fact that Hjelmslev still conceives of the distinction between expression and content in the signifier-signified mode and therefore retains the subordination of the abstract machine to linguistics.”²⁷

While Hjelmslev avoids the signifier and signified relation in the sign, he returns to it in the definition of content and expression as a mode for their distinction. This means that although the character of being a signifier and being signified is avoided by Hjelmslev, the structure of paired elements found in signifier and signified theories is retained. Instead of the open and nomadic distributions of structure and its undoing, in diagrams of changing multiplicities, we have fundamental structures of paired elements which take precedence over—rule over—any other process.

The basic problem is in the idea of an element, the simplicity of the rules and the idea of paring of functions across two different realms. For Hjelmslev, there are definable basic elements in ruled structures whose functional relations give

us prior knowledge of language and determine how any possible language can be formed.

The process rejection of this view is that there are no such elements. Instead, there are relations of stabilisation and destabilisation determined by the selection of more distinct yet still unstable neighbourhoods and directions against a substratum of all others. There is never a well-defined element and the selection of a set of elements is only a way of naming the processes around neighbourhoods.

Neither are there any ruled structures which determine any possible process. Instead, such structures should be seen, either, as illusory stability with changing processes, or, as stipulations over processes which seek to impose order upon them. Structures and their rules must therefore be replaced by diagrams that enact the novel processes involved in any sign.

Finally, the pairing of structures according the model inherited from relations of signifier and signified is wrong for the sign, because any sign is a shifting multiplicity of relations rather than one-to-one functions across realms. The sign is never a sign for something, or even two functionives that are each for something. The sign is a process enacted by a suite of diagrams named by the selection of a set.

NOTES

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3. O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation*, 9.
4. John Mullarkey *Post-Continental Philosophy: an Outline*. London: Continuum, 2006, 157.
5. Kamini Vellodi, "Diagrammatic thought: two forms of constructivism in C. S. Peirce and Gilles Deleuze," *Parrhesia* 19 (2014), 7-95 http://www.parrhesiajournal.org/parrhesia19/parrhesia19_vellodi.pdf
6. Vellodi, "Diagrammatic thought."
7. Vellodi, "Diagrammatic thought."
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9. Vellodi, "Diagrammatic thought."
10. Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*. Paris: Minuit, 1986, 42.
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12. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 42.
13. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 42.
14. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 43.
15. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 42.
16. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 42.
17. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 43.
18. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 43.
19. Deleuze, *Foucault*, 128.
20. Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Trans. Francis J. Whitefield. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961, 10.
21. Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, 11.
22. Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, 10.
23. Louis Hjelmslev, *Language: An Introduction*. Trans. Francis J. Whitfield. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970, 36.
24. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*. Trans Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, 58.
25. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 526.
26. Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*, 61.
27. Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 526.