

## Introduction

Examining the histories, epistemic functions and the shifting aesthetic paradigms of diagrams in their relationship to text and performance, this Element illuminates how diagrammatic practices have been pivotal to theatre- and performance-making in different cultural and sociopolitical contexts. Their ability to act as graphic and schematic tools for creating spatial and visual constellations turns diagrams into distinctive instruments for mediating transformations of ideas into real-world situations. Due to their potentiality to serve both as dramaturgical models for performance-making and as archives/scores, diagrams multiply epistemic and aesthetic perspectives on theatrical and choreographic creation.<sup>1</sup>

Confronted with the reduction to the medium of speech, theatre has incessantly engaged in reinventing its theatricality and performativity. If performance-making is not only about the spoken word, representation and fiction, it could be asked: what is the role of materiality, viscosity and spatiality? Is it possible to formulate a non-hierarchical model of performance departing not from the primacy of the speaking subject but from multisensorial scripturality<sup>2</sup> of graphic traces and affective embodiment? One of the Element's aims is to shift the focus from the fictional worlds of textual representation to the materiality, viscosity and spatiality of performance. However, this does not imply that I consider fiction and materiality as opposite sides of performance-making. Instead, I would like to demonstrate their blending which, as I will argue, can be comprehended diagrammatically.

Overshadowing other means of expression, spoken and recited texts have dominated classical forms of Western dramatic performance, particularly genres like tragedy. With the dramatic text serving as the primary impulse for the play of theatrical signs, the materiality of stage and performance were most of the time suppressed. In other words, spatiality, viscosity and corporeality were subordinated to the primacy of speech and text. Published in 1498 (the Latin translation by Giorgio Valla), Aristotle's *Poetics* became a seminal text influencing the theories, dramaturgies and performance practices over the last 500 years. For the Greek

<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere, I have written extensively on *diagrammatic dramaturgy* organized around generating 'the move/translation of concepts to concrete and lived/danced experiences' (2021: 56).

<sup>2</sup> Taking up and deconstructing the notion of the *pharmakon* as it appears throughout Plato's dialogues, Jacques Derrida identifies 'the exclusion and devaluation of writing', which is a direct consequence of the opposition of diction to scription as well as Plato's denigration and refusal to attribute written text with the ability to convey the truth (1981: 158). This ontological degradation of writing, Derrida shows, is foundational to a set of dualisms such as soul/body, good/evil and light/darkness that underpin the metaphysical, theological, poetic and political structures of the Western world. In the case of theatre and performance, the dualistic and logocentric ontology results in the opposition stage/audience, presence/absence, voice/body, text/performance and performance/documents.

philosopher, every tragedy has six parts: ‘story, stats of character, wording, thinking, *spectacle*, and song-making’ (2005: 27, my emphasis).

According to this typology, *opsis* (ὄψις Gr. Orig.) – the optical and visual element of performance or spectacle – is insignificant and subdued to the ‘agency of speech’ (Aristoteles, 2006: 49) Such a logocentric organization of (dramatic) theatre with the speaking subject at the centre resulted in the substitution of the actor’s body with a sign. The emphasis on speech generated a condition in which the viscerality of performance is subsumed to the semiotic function, resulting in the priority of acting styles that aim to create an illusionary double of the world. In other words, the actor’s task in the naturalistic and realist theatre was to generate a fictional situation on stage. Drawing on Hans Thies-Lehmann, it could be argued that by downgrading *opsis*, Aristoteles created the condition in which ‘the staged event is basically superfluous’ (2016: 1).

Asserting that diagrams complicate any system of knowledge revolving around dichotomies such as space/time, text/image, stage/spectator and body/mind, the ensuing sections discuss the potentiality of diagrammatic models to foster discursive operations that surpass clear-cut definitions and institutional, disciplinary or cultural hierarchies. At the same time, their capacity to expose what a performance can be and become makes the diagram an effective dramaturgical tool for connecting texts, scripts and other means with their potential scenic embodiments in the future.

Starting with the architectural diagram in the *Ten Books on Architecture* by Vitruvius, Section 1 examines the relation between theatre and astrology that is further reconstructed in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus*. In Section 2, the focus shifts to the cartographic and diagrammatic methodology underpinning the *Mnemosyne-Atlas* as it was developed by the art historian Aby Warburg in the late 1920s. In this section, I will also survey the affective aspect of performance diagrams by analysing the spells and drawings of Antonin Artaud. Section 3 assesses the performance *Paradise Now* (the Living Theatre) and the lecture performance *I Am 1984* (Barbara Matijević), asking if it is possible to converge poetics with the politics of performance diagrams.

Drawing on Thea Brezjek’s and Laurence Wallen’s argument from their book on the model as performance, I will demonstrate that diagrams in theatre and dance display the poetic process of performance-making.<sup>3</sup> For Brezjek and Wallen, the concept and practice of the model, as it appears in scenography and architecture, plays a major role in the design and, thus, is an essential tool

<sup>3</sup> The notion of poetics, which I will use throughout this Element, refers primarily to the material and conceptual process of artistic creation in literature, visual arts, music and theatre. As such, the theoretical and analytical concept of poetics can be utilized to comprehend how a specific work of art or (in our case) performance comes into being.

for creation. Arguing that model-making and modelling processes (to this, I add diagramming) are vital to research and explore the formal elements of performance, Brezjek and Wallen highlight the immanent poetic aspect. Linked, as they write, ‘to invention and imagination more than the pragmatic need of the scenographer and the architect (. . .) models are physical and conceptual instruments of the cosmopoetic (world-making) act – they are able to comprise entire worlds’ (2018: 11).

Accordingly, *The Poetics of Performance Diagrams* is an attempt to interrogate how diagrammatic practices can shed new light on performance-making. As it will be examined, one conceptual feature of diagrams is the capacity to unfold reflection that moves away from regimes of representation and dualistic paradigms. For John Mullarkey, the diagram is an ‘indefinite relation of subject-world intertwining’ and, therefore, has the power to manifest ‘as an indefinite set of materialised ‘betweens’: between symbolic representation and iconic presentation, discourse and inscription, matheme and patheme, digital and analogue, geometry and art, internal representation and external picture, audience and artwork’ (2006: 159–180). Understood as moving form endowed with the potentiality to unsettle dominant systems of representation, diagrams in this Element are envisioned as expressive instruments of *poetics without hierarchies*.

A significant quality of (performance) diagrams is their proximity to topological and cartographic modalities. Both maps and diagrams make visible graphic constellations between images and text. At the same time, neither maps nor diagrams function merely as representations but rather establish a dynamic, relational spatiality that accentuates processuality. Reflecting on the diagrammatic impulse and its relation with the concept of *poetic cartography*, the visual artist Simonetta Moro demonstrates the *carto-aesthetic* qualities of diagrams.<sup>4</sup> The diagrammatic and the cartographic impulse intersect in the possibilities of performing the line, ‘which include the geometric line, the written line, the graphic line’ (Moro, 2021: 115).

Analysing the handwritten notations of Walter Benjamin – many of which are diagrammatic – Moro shows how these graphic constellations of words and symbols challenge hierarchies and linearity, exposing a free-floating series of connections. The nonlinear way of organizing ideas and concepts in many ways resembles drawing and mapping. The shift to diagrammatic and cartographic practices of writing (instead of the more traditional, linear mode), I argue, sets in motion a *graphic force* which, at the same time, reads as a rehabilitation of the

<sup>4</sup> The concept of *poetic cartography* results from Moro’s refusal to separate the political from the poetic. She writes: ‘Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that a new, radical poetic cartography is necessary to illuminate issues at the forefront of current world crises and events, from mass migration to ecological collapse, from new nationalisms to a postborder world’ (2021: 139).

‘graphic signifier’ and enables the rediscovery of the materiality and viscosity of writing (Derrida, 1981: 110).

Drawing a parallel with the postdramatic poetics of theatre and performance, such a (diagrammatic) move signifies the liberation of affectivity and sensuality from the closures of representation and the dictatorship of phonocentric theatre. In other words, the *re-turn* to diagrams will enable me to revisit the performance’s spatial, corporeal and visual elements (the *opsis*.) As Thies-Lehmann shows, for Plato *opsis* ‘is fundamentally subject to error’, and hence must be distinguished from the ‘inner logicity’ of the intellect being the only instance at which truth can be thought (2016: 27).

The hostility towards visuality – and here we could add not just for visuality but also towards the visceral and the materiality of performance – is the consequence of Plato’s dualism that had created an epistemic and ontological schism between the physical world and the realm of ideas. The effect of this *double split* between mind and matter is the denigration of senses and sensuality. Due to their explicit relationality, diagrams show the potential to act as poetic devices of entanglement, visualizing knowledge, moving bodies across binary divisions and generating new social realities through aesthetic events.

With this in mind, I propose to define the concept of performance diagrams invoking the *relational poetics* theorized by the French writer, poet and philosopher Édouard Glissant. Analysing the poetics that were held responsible for the entrance of French literature into modernity, he identifies the *poetics of depth*, the *poetics of language-in-itself* and the *poetics of structure*. Yet, there is, Glissant writes: ‘another unnoticed, or rather evaded (poetics) that we shall call a poetics of relation’ (1997: 26). As a form of geographical writing that aims to untangle the colonial matrix, Glissant grounds his concept of relationality in the graphic and spatial elements of writing. Retracing the dangerous journey of slaves from the African continent to the Americas, he revisits the confrontation between the powers of the written word and the impulses of orality.

In an argument against the notion of roots, Glissant returns to the *rhizomatic thought* charted by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. His concept of the ‘Poetics of Relation’ thus challenges any fixed concept of identity and contrasts it with nomadic thinking. The poetics of performance diagrams is premised on a similar model of thought organized around errant<sup>5</sup> movements. In other words, the poetics I would like to formulate in the following sections traverses the dualities built around representation, identification and territoriality.

<sup>5</sup> As Glissant shows, the great founding books of communities such as the *Old Testament*, *Odyssey*, *Aeneid* or the African epics ‘were all books about exile and often about errantry.’ A passionate desire to rebel against roots acknowledging ‘the rhizome of a multiple relationship with the Other’ that becomes manifest in the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud. See Glissant (1997: 15–16).

Another theoretical impulse to articulate a poetic model of performance creation based on the diagrammatic is the work of the German philosopher Sybille Krämer. Intending to deconstruct the binary opposition between text and image, she conceived the concept of ‘operational imagery’ (*Operative Bildlichkeit*, Ger. Orig.). Interpreting the diagram as a cultural technique and mode of thinking, she radicalizes Derrida’s project on grammatology by substituting it with *diagrammatology*.<sup>6</sup> According to Krämer, the diagrammatic comes from the interaction between imagination (*Einbildungskraft* Ger. Orig.), the eye and the hand. It is a spatial relation that ‘mediates between the sensual and the sense’ (2009: 105).

Closely related to the concept of operational imagery is Krämer’s notion of *text-visibility* (*Schriftbildlichkeit*, Ger. Orig.). It implies a synthesis of visibility, manageability and flatness, all of which are attributes of the diagrammatic. This, we could say, enables us to comprehend the spatiality and visibility of writing and thinking. Demonstrating that diagrams are not only elements of visualization but instruments of experimentation, Krämer argues that they convey new epistemic constellations between concepts and senses. In the closing paragraphs, she writes that the diagram becomes a *stage* on which we can locate the ‘liaisons between seeing and thinking’ (2009: 117). By identifying the theatre stage as such a locus where the act of seeing becomes intertwined with thought, this Element asserts poetic and conceptual proximities between performance and the diagrammatic.

At this point, the reader might wonder how diagrams can *actually* be related to theatre, dance and performance. What are the possible conceptual and theoretical intersections between diagrams and performance practices? Can we deploy them to examine the redistribution of sociopolitical forces within a performance? Furthermore, can diagrams unfold knowledge about interdisciplinary and transcultural performance moving across medial, geographical and cultural borders? What can they disclose about the archiving strategies within performance and theatre studies?

In diverse disciplines such as mathematics, psychoanalysis, art history and information sciences, diagrams play a decisive role in argumentation by visualizing epistemic constellations between speculative and empirical data. While they are theorized in philosophy and in semiotics by authors such as Charles S. Peirce and Fredrik Stjernfelt, diagrams have been almost entirely absent from theatre and performance studies. One notable exception is the research by the

<sup>6</sup> Although Krämer evokes a ‘linguistically oriented turn to visibility’ in philosophy that can be attributed to Derrida, she argues that because of a certain ‘iconophobia’, the pictorial dimension of writing has been obscured (2009: 97).

theatre scholar Irit Degani-Raz who published two articles focusing on the reconstruction of performance diagrams in the work of Samuel Beckett.

With the intention of expanding the semiotics of theatre, Degani-Raz argues ‘to include diagrams within the scope of application of the icon to this art’ (2008: 133). Doing so enables her to interpret Beckett’s short play *Come and Go* as a spatial manifestation of a mathematic-like diagram, according to which the three female figures with the distinctive colour of their costumes (violet, red, yellow) have the function of indexical signs. More precisely, ‘the three actresses on stage are *icons* of three women in the fictional world’, which implies that the diagram epitomized in the theatrical text reads as an axiom of the geometry of human existence (2008: 142). Degani-Raz emphasizes the epistemological mechanism underpinning diagrammatic iconicity and suggests a structural homology between the fictional world and reality. Furthermore, Beckett’s theatrical diagram indicates a system of permutations grounded in a speculative logic of possible worlds.

In her second article from 2021, she moves the focus to diagrammatic reasoning within theatre. Herewith, she ‘exposes previously unrecognized logical procedures that are activated during the process of deciphering a theatrical work’ (2021: 2). Such an undertaking sheds light on new formal ways of understanding the spatial aspects of dramatic texts. Examining the central role of iconicity allows her also to explore the creative ways by which playwrights and directors have incorporated diagrams into their plays and performances. When considering diagrams from a semiotic standpoint, as suggested by Degani-Raz, we must reflect on their double aesthetic and epistemic functions.

Surveying diagrams within a threefold discursive and conceptual framework – historical, epistemic and aesthetic – *The Poetics of Performance Diagrams* illuminates how theatre and dance emerge from the intersections of knowledge, culture and imagination. With an emphasis on the different forms within theatre and performance, diagrams in the following sections are examined as architectural schemata, a book illustration, drawings on paper, a booklet/poster and choreographed traces written on a paper/blackboard. Hence, they are reflected in their capacity to serve as poetic displays relating acts of diagramming to performance-making.

This Element is structured around three sections with two central case studies diffracted through a multifocal theoretical and interpretative apparatus. Methodologically, it connects close reading with iconographical analysis (Sections 1 and 2) and performance analysis (Section 3). Accordingly, the themes are arranged chronologically, displaying historical examples and comparing them with case studies from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

The specific selection of the analysed diagrams is motivated by the intention to illuminate their heterogeneity and hybridity while showing different

manifestations across different historical and cultural contexts. Following a diachronic trajectory, I am focusing on case studies in which the diagram is the central and prominent element of the performance. Except for the last example, which concerns a dance performance, the other five elucidate the epistemic and aesthetic relationship between theatre and ritual. What conceptually connects them is the manifestation and survival of hermetic and cosmological symbolism expressed, documented and disseminated through diagrams.

Since this is not a comprehensive and exhaustive study but rather a preliminary attempt to initiate a transdisciplinary discussion about the graphic and diagrammatic performance dimensions, numerous diagrams are not considered. For instance, what is left out<sup>7</sup> is the diagram of Stanislavski's system from 1935 and Richard Schechner's graphical configuration of performance from 1977. Performance diagrams are especially widely present in various choreographic practices, such as the works of Trisha Brown, Rudolf Laban<sup>8</sup> and William Forsythe. Without the objective of providing a definite classification and analysis of diagrams in dance, I am reflecting on their possibility to articulate a different, non-dualistic approach to the entanglements of dance, writing and image.

Section 1, *Performance Diagrams and the Poetics of Cosmological Space*, discusses the Roman theatre plan formulated by the Roman architect Marcus Vitruvius. In a close reading of his book *Ten Books on Architecture*, I will show how Vitruvius invokes a diagrammatic scene outlining the geometrical plan of the theatre. As the only book on architectural theory to have survived from Antiquity, it influenced cultural imagination and performance space design during the Renaissance. Since Vitruvius' diagram echoes the Platonic concept of the microcosm outlined in the dialogue *Timaeus*, the analysis reconstructs the cosmological diagram embedded in the architectural and spatial model. I argue that this model plays a pivotal role in comprehending performance space's history, architecture and *cosmopoetics*. At the same time, it potentially sheds new light on the relationship between ritual and performance.

In the second part of the section, the focal point shifts to the iconographical analysis of the woodcut given on the title page of the 1620 edition of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. It depicts the magus standing within a circular structure embellished with symbols of the Zodiac and the seven planets. He holds

<sup>7</sup> Both Stanislavski's and Schechner's diagrams are presented in a visual essay by Richard Gough in the volume *On Diagrams & the Diagrammatic*. See Gough (2022).

<sup>8</sup> As Paola Crespi shows, in Laban's case the productive tension between movement and writing gives birth to a diagrammatic rethinking of the 'vexed relationship between writing, movement and corporeality' (2022: 108).

a magician's rod in his right hand and, in his left, an open book. Interpreting the image as *diagrammatic scene* aims to examine its relation to the cosmological model of theatre as described by Vitruvius. The comparison of the two diagrams (Vitruvius and Marlowe) will show overlapping points and it will elucidate the shift to early modernity. Analytically, the section cross-connects spatial theory (architecture) and cultural history with theatre studies, iconography and philosophy.

Section 2, *Transmission of Affects between Bodies and Images*, looks at the unfinished *Mnemosyne-Atlas* created by the art historian Aby Warburg in the 1920s. He made it intending to map image movements from Antiquity to the Middle Ages and their afterlives in the Renaissance. Centred around the notion of the 'Pathos Formula', designating the ability of images to capture and express extreme affective states, Warburg's *Atlas* is both a map and a diagrammatic device. As such, it navigates and retraces movements of images in and across bodies. Since Warburg focuses on the transhistorical motion of pictorial themes, the *Atlas* disrupts any fixed geographical and temporal division between the 'East' and the 'West'. Moreover, it brings to attention an interwoven and dynamic art and theatre history. In this section, I will argue that such a diagrammatic structure can be applied to performance and dance studies. Especially, if the aim is to rethink the dualism between performance/memory and shifts the research focus to translocal connections between different performance cultures.

Analysing the series of drawings that Antonin Artaud had devised from 1937 to his death in 1948, the second example in the section reveals the affective dimension of performance diagrams. Revaluating the mythological and ritualistic aspect of Greek theatre and referring to the secret teachings of the Kabbalah and alchemy, Artaud performs his drawings believing they have the power of magic spells. I interpret these diagrams as an affective expression of embodied forces moving beyond the closures of representation. What is foregrounded is the capacity of diagrammatic poetics to unfold new corporeal scenarios and enable a different approach to text and performance-making. Together, the two case studies make visible the potentiality of diagrams to entangle performance cultures and thereby trespass the dividing lines between the East and the West.

Section 3, *Towards Sociopolitical Diagrams*, formulates a detailed analysis of the diagram circulated as a booklet and poster for the 1968 performance *Paradise Now* by the Living Theatre. It displays the figure of a man and of a woman. Their bodies are traversed with sentences and diagrammatic schemes written in Hebrew letters, Tantric symbols and hexagrams taken from the book *Ji-Ching*, an ancient Chinese divination text. Activating the diagram, the performers on stage engage in a corporeal action of forming letters with their

bodies. Interpreting this theatrical situation as a diagrammatic act visualizing and embodying the script, I will demonstrate the intermedial transfer between the stage, the bodies and the text. Moreover, I will argue that the *Paradise Now* performance sets in motion a *revolutionary diagram*. It aims to traverse the distinction between the stage and the audience and blur the dividing line between art, activism and politics.

The second example in this section is the project *I Am 1984* from 2008 by the Croatian artist Barbara Matijević. It is a pseudo-scientific journey into the historical and cultural facts of 1984. As a performative multiplication of different narrative layers ranging from her autobiographical memories, the national history of socialist Yugoslavia (where she was born) and world history, the piece is choreographed as a lecture performance. With the focus on performing a diagram on paper, the choreography poetically blends visual traces with writing, speaking and movement. Drawing connections between personal memory, fiction, actual events from sports to the entertainment industry, media culture and advertising, Matijević uses the diagram to explore the digital age of hypertextual networks. In doing so, she engages the audience in an intricate narrative that reads as a social critique of the machinic enslavement and the tyranny of semiotic operations.

By analysing multiple manifestations of diagrams, this Element inaugurates a heterogeneous discursive trajectory that blends historical and cosmological aspects of performance-making with contemporary reflections about the politics of performance in the context of an accelerating algorithmic data flow. Traversing the boundaries between image, text and corporeality, the concept of the performance diagram proposes a non-hierarchical and nomadic poetics. Lastly, arguing against dualism, representation and the primacy of phonocentric fiction, the sections outline a performative territory haunted by affectivity and viscerality. In that way, this Element becomes a conceptual and speculative map to navigate the *chaosmosis* of performance creation.

## 1 Performance Diagrams and the Poetics of Cosmological Space

Written near the end of the first century BC, the book *De Architectura* by Marcus Pollius Vitruvius is one of the rare works on architecture to have survived from Antiquity. After the Italian scholar and Renaissance humanist Poggio Bracciolini discovered a copy of the manuscript from the ninth century at a monastery library in St. Gall (Switzerland), it became a vital source for artists, architects and writers, especially during the Renaissance. Dedicated to Caesar Augustus, *De Architectura* reads as a treatise on different elements of the theory and practice of architecture. For Vitruvius, architecture consists of three