PROBLEMATICS OF NON-REPRESENTATION
- WHERE SPECULATION AND OPERATION MEET

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Toyo Ito diagnosed in 1996 the theoretical frame for both evaluating, understanding and creating architecture. Two antagonistic poles seemed to him to have paradoxically framed the profession for centuries: architecture on one hand placed within social systems and established public order, a simple question of institutional convention, and on the other hand lauded as individual expression of artistic intention. Caught between representing power and representing mind, architecture seems theoretically reduced to mere reproduction of questionable ideologies.

The traditional architectural planning methods are just as insufficient, according to Stan Allen, since they operate with 'translation' and 'interpretation', thus presupposing categories of representational relations. Relations between medias - such as drawings, texts, models, buildings - become limited to relations of conventional semiotics: 1) *the plan*, based on the similitude of the iconic, 2) *the notation*, based on the convention of the symbolic and 3) the *site identity*, based on the contiguity of the indexical.

But given the speculative as well as operative impotence of the concepts of social conventionality and psychological banality, of representation and interpretation, theorists have considered other sources of creativity and form, both speculative and operational. It seems unsatisfactory to make amputative compromises between

the two, risking to end up with both mediocre speculation (idealities) and mediocre operation (representations). What if a highly speculative theory might by itself become operational, and a operational theory might by itself be of a utmost speculative nature? Transpositional procedures between the two levels could be the categories of *the problem* and *the diagram*. Following the philosopher Gilles Deleuze's logic of sensation in his book on the painter Francis Bacon, this paper will suggest that leaving the idea of representation altogether is operationallyt helpful, and theoretically crucial. Both with respect to conceptualizing an existing work of architecture as well as opening up the creation of the new by means of diagrammatic experimentation.

The three ages of representation

In the history of philosophy as well as of the various artistic disciplines, a common presupposition seem to have dominated the way to define their tasks. In a critique of traditional philosophy, Deleuze and Guattari thus identify three major forms of regarding thought as representation: one form postulating the Great Object (the Idea, the God), one form postulating the Great Subject (the soul, consiousness, the rule of man, genius), and finally one form postulating eternal truth emanating from Intersubjectivity (communication, consensus, language). All three forms presumes that the world is split in two: at one side they have the ultimate guarantee for and source of eternal truth. This is an ideal level, it transcendents the fleeing nature of this world. Therefore all three forms are called idealisms, respectively objective idealism, subjective idealism and intersubjective idealism. At the other side we have the unstable immanent world of matter, beauty, pityless change and human mortality, clearly taking the underdog position in the dualist hierarchy searching for a transcendental 'world behind the world'.

The disciplines of thought are defined as representation within this dualist set-up: the task becomes how to represent the ideal entity and how the ideal entity allows us to represent the world as it really is.

In European Antiquity and Middle Ages the major trend became representation as related to the Great Object. When the specific act of thinking is confused with the general act of contemplation, as it was, it produces easily the illusion that there actually *is* a higher Object for contemplation: the universal Idea or the God. Contemplation of this transcendental, universalized absolute object, would consequently be assumed to deliver the eternal rules for correct representation of the rest of the world.

With the onset of early Enlightenment philosophy changed its emphasis inwards. The conscious, thinking 'I', known from Descartes' 'Cogito ergo sum', (I think therefore I am) seemed to be the fundamental reality, the new source of absolute and eternal certainty. Thinking would no longer be identified as the contemplation of the Absolute Object, but became confused with the general act of internal reflectivity, and this easily produced another kind of common illusion: 'I think', therefore 'I' must exist as the cause of all thinking. Consciousness was seen as an immortal substance independent of the mortal body and all of matter. The reflections of the I, the *subject*, was to be understood as the only stable universal condition for all certain knowledge, invulnerable to the dangers of worldly illusion. Thinking as 'reflecting' just had to proceed from this

one certainty of an eternal consciousness and from there could go through the necessary deductions, spelling out the correct representation of the world.

By the beginning of the 20th century the linguistic turn of philosophy and the ideas about structures forming language, psyche, culture and society, changed the emphasis of representational ideology in an *intersubjective* direction. Words were found to come in systems of interdependency. The once so great Subject was after all not in charge of itself, but relied on structural, unconsious interaction with other subjects. And cultural and historical patterns of meaning seemed to condition our every thought without us even knowing it. Universal intersubjectivity took the place behind or 'underneath' this world as the new transcendental ideality, that would be the source of true representations of the immanent world. Thinking would now mean to represent intersubjectivity by philosophical communication within the boundaries given by the collected consensual wisdom embedded in its social relations, languages and norms of cultural and historical majorities.

One could almost regard the dominant representational idealisms as a journey from superstition over narscisism to the platitudes of an eternal talkshow.

Thinking as creation

What happens when we percieve our own thinking as a matter of representation of an already fixed reality 'behind' this confusing worldy change? It becomes impossible to acknowledge the creative activity of artistic, philosophical or scientific thought. Instead everything becomes a question of copy versus original and of judging the mental products of thought by comparing it to an imagined ideality: law, inqusitor and judge in one big phantasm.

No doubt our brains perform countless banal activities. Constantly we objectify our environment, reflect our subjective memory and communicate social dogmas to reduce fear. But Deleuze and Guattari distingushes a potential of the brain to use itself in more interesting manners, that is to reach out to the edge of its own stupidity. They propose to see the essense of thinking as creation of specific 'things' new to the world: artistic sensations, scientific formulas and philosophical concepts are products of the creative and disciplined thinking activity of the living brain. When the brain reaches out to encounter an infinite complexity, not yet quite distinguishable, it doesn't have to represent anything. By constructing compositional sensations in art or consistent concepts in philosophy or referential functions in science, we become able to feel, understand and function in the world. By using our brains to re-organize itself we become a little different. We learn to interact with new aspects of an immanent reality, not representing it by postulating a detour around transcendent idealities, but rather 'becoming' it (and it becoming us) by growing mentally or physically able to mix our own forces with the other forces of the world.

Representation in art

Conceptualizing architecture and other artistic objects has historically suffered under the same kind of

representational fallacies. As more or less anonymous builder, the architect was for centuries supposed to do little more than to represent and support claims of political or religious power. He should provide the ruling class with a representation of military and economic supremacy and provide the religious class with a representation of unescapable godly control: palace, fortification, mausoleum, church.

Architecture was in other words directed towards representation of the Great Object. Still one can meet this way of thinking in a weaker manner, when art is judged by how well it represents its object, its 'model', thus placing the criterion and essence of art outside the of singular composition.

But not only philosophy turned away from representing the Great Object by the beginning of modern times. In philosophy the rationality of thinking subject began to occupy the point of focus, rather than ancient scripture or royal blood, and also artists began to leave the anonymity of the servant and acquire individual name and fame. By early romanticism the ideas of the independant artist, responsible only to the depths of his own genius, had claimed true art to be autonomous in order to be authentic. This new status of the artistic genius reflected not only a radical change in philosophical taste, but a growing need of new bourgeouis classes of socially mobile, ambitious and entrepenant citizens, able to gain independance from old feudal powers, to see their individuality reflected in their art and architecture as well. The era of romantic- modern art puts a great emphazis on the artistic intention, the spiritual will and the strike of inspired genius, in which the individual will see the supremacy of soul over matter reflected. Still one can meet weaker forms of this idea of evaluating art, focusing on interpretation of subjective intentions 'behind' the work, on the individual psychological events of the artists life and of course the collectors' frenzy over signatures: a famous artist has made this, thus it is art. Again the criterion of art is placed outside the concrete composition, when works are judged according to their representation of authentic subjectivity.

In a parallel to the philosophical and scientific turn towards granting a primary role to the intersubjectivity of language, culture and socialization, also architecture moved during the 20th century towards either the 'modernist' objectivity of rational living in large scale concrete blocks or towards the 'postmodernist' eclecticism of entertainment, comfortzones and cultural ready-mades. In both cases, what seemed to have become the criterion for architectural excellency was its willing representation of the cultural codes and social consensus of the day. In the general public discussions of 'taste' became a question of friction free accomodation of recognizability and even professional arthistorians would defend the idea that art simply is what social groups agree to put in galleries. It is in a gallery, thus it is art.

Problematics and diagrams

"If you haven't found the problem to which a concept corresponds, everything stays abstract. If you've found the problem, everything becomes concrete." (Deleuze in an interview with Claire Parnet)

This importance of the specificity of problematics should apply to art and architecture as well. Of course, they don't create concepts, but rather create compositions of sensations that affects the way we are able to feel and perceive. Discussing the paintings of Francis Bacon, Deleuze describes how Bacon, in the non-verbal art of painting, discovers and struggles with specific problems or problematics, such as how to avoid the kliché or how to paint figures without reducing them to the banalities of narratives. The way his paintings have become, the syntheses of lines and colours they make and the sensuous impacts they are capable of, must be understood as a function of how a canvas discovers and address its problematics. The specific artistic strenght of these paintings cannot be understood in terms of how well they represent anything: neither an objective motive, a subjective psyche or an intersubjective communicative code. How to go about it then?

The condition for any solution is its specific problem. But once a solution appear in actual extension, construction and sensation, it will replace its problem, which remains virtual. To uncover the unseen problems, the only access is the concrete piece of art. This amounts to not asking what the artwork *mean*, but what it *does*.

To sense a work of art with ones naked neurosystem is a nonverbal way of penetrating its problem, feel it, sense it, swim in it rather than understand it. To feel Bacon's paintings in a direct manner is to get in touch with the forces of their problematics through their solutions. But to understand his paintings philosophically is making the effort to investigate their solutions 'backwards' in a way, to make reappear the problematics working inside them and capture them by creating interrelated concepts.

The diagram is Deleuze's term for an operational method used by Bacon to disturb the constant pressure on painting from cultural images, narratives, expectations, clichés and figurality. The diagram is like a machine of creativity. It destructs partially the order of given entities and presents possibilities for a redistribution of elements according to the forces to be captured. When successful, Bacon will have captured forces of falling, light, escape, time, and rendered them visible. That is a problem: how not to render the visible, but to make invisible forces visible? The diagram itself, its chaos, its experimentation, is not painted. It operates on the material, runs it through series of possibilities, splitting and reconnecting it.

On the one hand, problematics make the concepts of theory immediately concrete and tangible. And on the other hand the emergence of the problem is that which slowly occurs as one diagrammatizes the material - architectural drawings, models, theories or otherwise. With Gilles Deleuze as well as Manuel De Landa, the regime of representation should be challenged and refuted philosophically by concepts like the diagram, the problem and the emergent. Consistent with this project Ito proposes his diagrammatical architecture. Diagrammatics and problematics suggest an entrance to the creative production of meaning, common to both philosophy, architecture and architectural theory.

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