Dr. Jondi Keane is an arts practitioner, critical thinker and senior lecturer in the Image at Deakin University who publishes on issues of embodiment, practice-led research and experimental architecture and produces site-specific projects, performative-installations and art-science experiments.

**Title: Lissitzky: new materialism and diagrammatic living.**

**Short Abstract**
Lissitsky's spatial and architectural work anticipates the contemporary fascination with expanded fields of activity that have resulted in transdisciplinary approaches to research and the role of practice-led research. This paper will discuss Lissitzky's suprematist perspective in relation to contemporary practices - under the rubric of the "diagram" - that re-imagine and enact the relationship between the built surround and embodied cognition. Lissitzky's work will serve as the starting point for a discussion of contemporary practitioners and theorists working across philosophy, cognitive science and built environment in order to draw out, through the act of diagramming, life on new terms.

**Long Abstract**
Lissitzky’s work offers insight into the way the history of the image, the production of space and theories of an enactive embodied mind have co-mingled over the last 100 years. In this lecture I will discuss Lisitzky's work through a few key concepts proposed in essays such as "A or Pangeometry" and "Proun" with a particular focus on suprematist perspective as an alternative to Eastern and Western perspective produced for example, through the convex and concave camera lenses of Europe and China. This comparison maps onto Norman Bryson's discussion of the gaze and eastern and western perspective relative to the subject. What arises from this mapping is a clear difference between the way the origin and centre of space is conceived either at / beyond the horizon (European lens and Western perspective) or in the person (Chinese lens and Eastern perspective). These contrasting formations of subject-space have huge implications for Lissitzky's suprematist perspective as well as for the history of lived abstraction as it is tracked through the contemporary rubric
of the "diagram." This opens onto the numerous conceptions of the diagram, from Pierce and Deleuze, to Eisenman and Massumi and Arakawa & Gins, suggesting critical intersections that are resonate with potential. Perhaps the most informative connection to be made across these conceptions of the diagram is the link between Lissitzky's spatial approach to "plural creation" (PROUN = project for the affirmation of the new) and Arakawa & Gins' procedural architecture and biotopological diagramming. The aim of the diagram and diagrammatic living is to acknowledge that the material of social change and even social justice is configured and distributed through the daily enactments of body-environment.

Lissitzky: new materialism and diagrammatic living
17 Nov 2011

Introduction.
Practitioners point of view and approach to the value of re-entering the examining the past.

In my preparation for this talk I have struck upon what for me is an unexpected approach to describing the trajectory to which Lissitzky belongs or in which he participates- and in some ways helps to anticipate. Two ontological perspectives emerge as possibilities for constructing both the perceiver and the overarching relation of person to world – that is to say the world forming potential available to a person and a collective, this potential involves moving from 1) a classical perspective - assumed to be a discovery rather than a construction, which I will call hearsay perspective because it positions the individual in relation to the origin of space as an unwilling perpetrator in an pre-given world—to 2) an emergent perspective – constructed by the perceiver as a function of their participation in the forming of the world that is in the process of world-forming. Which I will call heresy because it shares with the history of heresy the notion of an personal and individual relation to the production of space, the origin of space and it assigned value as other and divine. The other way to describe this is via Lyotard’s notion of the “pagan,” which appear in Just Gaming (1985) Minnesota

The "pagan" is postmodern. It is unlike the "classical" in that it is not determined by prior criteria.
“The classical assumes a homogeneity of culture, or an "internalized set of rules" (9), or a "possible consensus" (15) that enable the author to anticipate the reactions of readers.
The postmodern/pagan has no such rules. The act of writing is a specific performance that Lyotard associates with "experimentation" (10), "rusing" (41), "innovation," and the testing of "hitherto untouched limits of sensibility or of culture" (14).
The pagan has ethical and political implications, it is both a principle of change, revision, "variation" (33-34), possibly revolution and a principle of tradition, social unity, belonging, cultural history.
The pagan also describes within discourse pragmatics a Levinasian priority of ethics over ontology.
The pagan is a particular relationship to otherness, a sense of "obligation" to extend and preserve the foundation of justice. This ethics is a responsibility to listen and to pass on the specific dynamics of an exchange between speaker and listener which demands not servitude from the listener but rather that the listener speak. In this is preserved the freedom to speak for oneself.
This specific dynamics demands freedom from criteria. It is pagan.

Aligned with an ethos of postmodernity as in terms of the grand narrative that would prescribe value to a given perspective, Lissitzky offer, a critique of the inherent ideology of perspective and moves to a mechanical perspective (anticipating the types of analyses that Johathan Crary does in techniques of the observer that links optical technology to the structure of seeing). This means that the perspective offered by the project from the affirmation of the new and by Suprematist approaches to the dissolution of the barriers between art and life, is a delimited perspectival space of capacity constrained by disposition and orientation. (a speculative pragmatism)

Rosenthal (1986) Speculative Pragmatism, begins with pragmatism and scientific method, moves to a consideration of perceptual experience, and thence to metaphysics, offering "a speculative analysis, via extrapolation from the pervasive features of lived experience, of what ...independent reality must be like", then outlines a pragmatist view of "value" …

So in many ways the talk today is about how we assign value and give it a back story or origin and the way in which particular artist debunk the stories we institute as common ground.

As Mark Garcia point out in his book 2011 The Diagrams of Architecture, it is Peirce, Foucault and Deleuze that have made the diagram so relevant today. Deleue concept of the diagram as an “abstract machine .. a map of relation between forces” (Garcia : 23).

Vidler in his essay “What is a Diagram Anyway?” in Cassara ‘s Peter Eisenman: Feints (2006), says the diagram is the Icon of relationships that is “the relations between unformed /unorganized matter and unformalised/unfinalised functions” (Garcia: 24). Vidler accepts Deleuze’s notion that the diagram as a spatiotemporal abstract map/machine and multiplicity which “refuses every formal distinction between a content and an expression” and distinguishes the diagram from drawing in
that “diagrams represent abstractions symbolically”. (Garcia: 24) Hence much discussion of the ontological and metaphysical status of the diagram.

The diagram and diagrammatic enactments replace drawing but in retaining its materiality and situatedness the diagram must be a drawing of relationality (diagramming) that mixes and cuts across levels of abstraction to produce forms of relation that span those levels through some indicative material means.] Here that material process is the embodied enactment of the environment in which it lives and live through it.

Lissitzky work open up a diagrammatic approach not only because he does not confine himself to the techniques of drawing to deliver the new modes of relationality, but because his way of engaging lead to an embodied or lets say biotopological mode of engagement that theories of cognition called enaction are currently labouring under as well as artist-turned –architects Arakawa and Gins deem to be crucial to life on new terms, namely the inseparability of the organsim fro the surroundings.

The plural creation of Lissitzky is not unlike William James’ notion of a pluriverse or / multiverse or to what biologist Stuart Kauffman calls the adjacent possible. Each of these notion points to the potential that is a hair’s breath away fro realisation (being realised and in the realisation that makes it possible or ready to be made)

This biotopologlical modes of diagramming, emerging in parallel ideas like the “biogram” from Massumi recognises the act of attention as a mode of prompting in the perception-action cycle and therefore a way of observing the world n a ay that cannot but transform it. In many ways this is a new kind of democratisation of labour whereby the embodied acts of perception attention and awareness are the acts that constitute a new materialism, the materiality of thought, its rub and quick. That is the approach that I have draw from my understanding of the way the arts and science contribute to each other’s blind spot; the blind spots within affect and effect which go undetected under a single regime of thought.
From Lissitzky and an ontology of position (as determined by orders of perspective) 
Through notion of the diagram to Arakawa and Gins procedural architecture.

The gaze as the classical posture of perspective

Repositioning uses ‘systems given-to-be-seen’ or stains as Lacan calls them (1981: 74) to dismantle the systematic coupling of body to world that enforces this or that ontological perspective, as an example of a possible world. Lacan noted all that is left of the ‘gaze’ is a stain (1981: 74), or more accurately, a series of stains that conflict and compete to colour a person’s worldview. ¹ As the following discussions will demonstrate, once ‘ontological perspectives’ are made perceptible they become open to deliberate interventions as quickly as disparate perceptions are subsumed under a genre of relation.²

¹ Lacan (1981) names the impact of the gaze upon the function of the eye, the stain, ‘marking the pre-existence to the seen of a given-to-be-seen’ (1981: 74). This is the way any object could trigger a genre that would arise to include itself. The presence of the stain ‘governs the gaze most secretly and that which always escapes from the grasp of that form of vision that is satisfied with itself in imagining itself as conscious’ (1981: 74). Lacan aligns the recursion (seeing oneself seeing), and the sleight of hand that seeks to avoid the function of the gaze, with the phenomenal experience of contemplation. This experience is why we attribute an all-seeing perspective of an absolute being to the spectacle of the world (1981: 75). The gaze circumscribes us as beings who are looked at without showing us this (1981: 75). In the question and answer section immediately following Lacan’s discourse on ‘The Split Between the Eye and The Gaze’, one question is recorded thus: ‘X. Audouard: To what extent is it necessary, in analysis, to let the subject know that one is looking at him, that is to say, that one is situated as the person who is observing in the subject the process of looking at oneself?’(1981: 77) Lacan’s answer to this extremely important question is academic. He positions his response in terms of disciplinary objectives, ‘of concern to analysts’, and history, to ‘discover whether psycho-analysis is a science’ and ‘historically define the notion of the subject’ (1981: 77). He claims that psychoanalysis is not a Weltanschauung, or philosophy with keys to the universe; rather it leads ‘the subject back to his signifying dependence’, yet he also wants psychoanalysis to grasp how tuché (touch) is represented in visual apprehension (1981: 77). Lacan constructs a worldview that relies heavily upon ‘the literary’ to ground his insights. Rabate (2001) observes: ‘Lacan’s slow transition from rhetorical and structuralist theory of the Symbolic based on the logic of the signifier to a theory of literary language caught between the effects of the written knot or hole and the simply spoken signifier’ (Rabate 2001: 17).

² Hubert Damisch in The Origin of Perspective (1995) discusses Brunelleschi’s experiment on perspective consisting of a panel painting of the Baptistery of San Giovanni in Florence with a viewing hole to be held opposite a mirror. Damisch notes that the importance of Brunelleschi’s experiment is: ‘that a point of view can be posited, grasped as such, in its value and function as origin, only retroactively and by means of a relay mechanism, a subsequent scansion, this di-monstratio, in the strict sense of the word, provided a rule governing apportionment between the imaginary and the symbolic’ (Damisch 1995: 126). Damisch sees this demonstration as a narrative of origin. Arakawa and Gins also build (demonstrate) the questions they are researching. Damisch is concerned with the painted panel and its effect upon the subject’s system of reference (rule of apportionment), whereas
In his discussion of the logic of relation, Massumi (2002: 68-88) comments that Michel Serres, Bruno Latour and Pierre Levy all use the soccer ball to discuss the relation of subject to object and individual to collective (2002: 71). Objects can open prefigured space to bottom-up perceptual processing, forging unanticipated relationships. It is curious that the object they chose has no intrinsic orientation (except perhaps one imposed by the writing on the ball). The soccer ball has no left and right. It is positioned in terms of a set of discursive rules that apply to its use in training and game situations. It is a cursor in the bodily discourse. Massumi observes that the ball’s effect is dependent on the physical presence of a multiplicity of other bodies and objects that catalyse the play as a whole but do not in themselves constitute a whole (2002: 73). In this way, like Marx’s dancing table and the potential it bears as a sign of its commodification, the ‘player is the object of the ball’ (2002: 73). The ball, because of its shape, connects into the sliding measure of scale and, due to its lack of orientation, highlights the axial grid of spatial reference.

Whereas the soccer ball conjures a stadium or reorganises the spatial relationships of a loungeroom, Lissitzky’s discussion of camera lenses shows how objects reveal worlds that appear to have pre-existed our ability to perceive them, like atoms or galaxies. In ‘A. and Pangeometry’ (1925), Lissitzky links bodily orientation to conventions of perspective formalised in European and Chinese camera lenses. The resulting ontological perspectives, presented below, (see Figures 49 and 50) illustrate how positioning oneself in relation to a projected origin and its consequent events, determines what a person can consider to be the limits of possibility.

Lissitzky’s diagram exposes two systems of perspective produced by Western and Eastern camera lenses to which his Suprematist exocentric perspective is the response (see Figure 48). On the left is the Chinese perspective and on the right is a perspective drawing based on Da Vinci’s Last Supper. In the middle rectangle, which has an X across it, Lissitzky asks where the tip of the pyramid lies? In the depth implied by the

---

Arakawa and Gins are concerned with enactments co-origination. They state: ‘The body is sited. As that which initiates pointing, selecting, electing, determining, and considering, it may be said to originate (read co-originate) all sites’ (Gins and Arkawa 2002: 5). Damisch, a student of Lacan sees the value of the analysis of perspective in psychoanalytic terms while Arakawa and Gins see the value in self-organising terms.
frame or in the viewer’s space in front of the picture plane? This perceptual problem highlights the conventional nature of seeing and reading aligned with, or confounded by, our sited and situated ‘looking’.

These visual technologies (lenses) comply with perceptual orientations and worldviews. Radically different notions of ground, origin, position (site and situation) and mobility are extrapolated from each system. Lissitzky suggests we have forgotten the mechanical and systematic nature of the Western camera accepting it as the structure of reality (Lissitzky-Küppers 1992: 353).

In the sketches below, I have transposed Lissitzky’s diagram to show the way a person is positioned by the ‘ontological perspectives’, rather than to show the resulting visual scene in relation to the camera lenses. The first ontological perspective, a Western perspective produced by the European camera, which uses a convex lens, supplies a mechanical and cubic perspective that recedes away from the picture plane towards the horizon. This perspective constructs a symbolic system of relations that originates beyond the horizon and projects from the vanishing point to

---

3 Suprematism would ignore the demands of conventional perspective systems and extend the visual pyramid to infinity. Lissitzky invoked the mathematical metaphor of imaginary numbers to propose how Suprematism would accomplish this feat. The indefinite space made possible in front and behind the picture plane utilises the real effects that imaginary or irrational numbers afford to us. His installation and essay of the same name: Proun: not world vision but world reality 1920, already begs the question of an ‘interspace’, the site of an intersection where culture and biology meet (Lissitzky-Küppers 1992: 352-58).
include all that we see (Figure 49). Persons (bodies as objects) are positioned as reflections of this system and produced as a result of its program. This worldview aligns with a Lacanian notion that attributes to the world an all-seeing capacity since our position is always already included or subsumed by its ubiquitous stain (Lacan 1981: 75).

Figure 49. ‘Ontological perspective’ that corresponds to Western perspective and European camera lens

The second perspective, an Eastern perspective, produced by the Chinese camera, uses a concave lens, also objective and mechanical, to suggest a world that curves back towards the person, pulling on the horizon seemingly to envelop the seeing subject (Figure 50). This perspective implies an existentially constructed experience that originates in the site of the person and emanates outward in all directions. This perspective is consistent with a notion of generative centres of activity.

Figure 50. ‘Ontological perspective that corresponds to Eastern perspective and Chinese camera lens.

The relationship a person has formed with a totalised image of the world, through the mediation of a specific object, is reinforced from early years of education to become an invisible scaffold that supports the world. Objects such as soccer balls govern apportionment through rules that constrain how a person engages with the ball.
However, other more complex objects such as books, govern apportionment through the content of the writing as well as through the physical qualities of the book and the orientational rules of print. As seen in the diagrams above, the relationship of a person to centres of action (symbolic positions of origin) produces directionality and relation by establishing right, left, up, and down.

Left and Right

Whether generated from lenses, texts, photo or digital images, paintings or screen projections, ‘ontological perspectives’ produce core beliefs concerning our actual, possible and virtual relationships to origins and events. They indicate how acts such as reading participate in elaborate person-world-universe orientation schemas. The Western ‘reflective’ tradition, expressed literally in the mirroring of person and world, reinforces the separation and object position of bodies in Western culture. The book as object that imparts knowledge and reinforces position in relation to the origin (also the source of knowledge) invoking genres of being, genres of inclusion, and genres of directionality and positionality. This can be seen in the physical manifestations of language on and off the page, in the hand and in the mouth and lungs.

Ontological perspectives, and the political-spatial scenarios of right and left they proliferate, may be considered historical artifacts of the cosmological stain of worldviews upon the organism, the person and the grid of existential relationships. Andrew Benjamin’s notion of ‘differential ontology’ (1993: 2) fits Arakawa and Gins’ approach to the archive of stains. Benjamin suggests that the ‘advent of the event’ or ‘ad-venture’ depends upon the recognition of ‘identity within difference and thus of the whole within the singular’ (1993: 7). An omitted awareness or inattention may account for the possibility of an event to be new again and occur without relation:

Spacing and relation involve more than that state of affairs in which one becomes a description or formulation of the other. Indeed spacing is implicated in more than spatial relations. Its presence and the consequences of its mode of being present will come to figure within the site of judgement while at the same time providing judgement’s necessity, the necessity for its effective presence. Judgement is the response to irreducibility – the status of the event –
itself a spacing within and thus held by ontology. (Benjamin 1993: 15)

Benjamin points out how we might understand the discord between actuality and experience that has caused philosophy to mis-recognise its own continuity by failing to understand the plurality (temporality) at work in repetition. Lissitzky understood the embodied implications when he asserted a notion of ‘plural creation’ in PROUN, acronym for ‘Project for the Affirmation of the New’:

The surface of PROUN ceases to be a picture and turns into a structure round which we must circle … circling round it we screw ourselves into the space. PROUN is leading us to the construction of a new body. It creates aims. … It [PROUN] introduces plural creation, where a new creative whole is produced by each variation and it begins to become a model of 3-D space and goes on to construct all the objects of everyday life. (in Lissitzky-Küppers 1992: 347-48)

The development of the continual reconfiguration that Lissitzky promised through Suprematism that is ‘new with each variation’ has meant that abstract systems also dance on their heads and sprout not grotesque forms but transforming bodies. The construction of a new body is precisely the aim of the reversible destiny project. Initiating movement within movement allows the non-linear dynamic of distributed cognition to emerge.4

The uses of totalised and totalising images

Passages from Deleuze, Peirce, Eisenman and Arakawa and Gins on diagram and diagramming.

Diagrams from Arakawa and Gins.

Instant referent delivery and as the familiar passes through itself

---

4 Antonio Damasio’s (1996) notion of somatic markers helps us to understand how distributed cognition influences selection and decision (1996: 199-200). ‘The action of biological drives, body states, and emotions may be an indispensable foundation for rationality. The lower levels in the neural edifice of reason are the same that regulate the processing of emotions and feelings. … These lower levels maintain direct and mutual relationships with the body proper, thus placing the body within the chain of operations that permit the highest reaches of reason and creativity’ (1996: 200)
Conclusions

Because this is a day about Lissitzky
I will not dwell on the current end of the trajectory to which he belongs
But I will say that
Theories of enaction and Biotopological diagramming
Emerge from the changes to the value of perception and action the thinking and feeling of which he was a part.

Works cited


Massumi, Brian (2002) Parables for the Virtual