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Diagrams and Time

Diagrams can be used in ways which parallel the different types of utterances recognized in classical speech act theory. A musical score, for example, can be used as a set of instructions for performance; or it can be used in marked-up form by a student of music to record her errors when performing. An architectural blueprint can be used as a set of instructions for building a building; but it can then later be used as a plan of the completed building or, in marked-up form, as a record of the work performed. But diagrams are able to perform such functions only if their users have a coordinated type of expertise. A musical score is as inert if there are not performers who have the expertise needed to follow its instructions. Our topic here is such diagrammatic expertise; its varieties (for instance the distributed expertise that is involved when a conductor conducts an orchestra); and its relation to time. We shall argue that in very many spheres our grasp of the processes unfolding in reality is mediated through diagrammatic expertise, and draw consequences for our understanding of phenomena such as music, planning, and law.

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