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Trace, Writing, Diagram
Reflections on Spatiality and Apperception (Anschauung)

If there is a crucial dichotomy in the human sciences, it is that between word and image, between representation and presentation, between the discursive and iconic forms of the symbolic. However there exists a sizable class of representational tools which challenge this binary ordering of the symbolic: Consider writing, tables, graphs, diagrams or maps. They arise as a conjunction of language and image. Their smallest common denominator arises from the interaction between point, line and plane. Let us call this class the “diagrammatic”. “Saying” and “showing” work together in the diagrammatic to create an “operative iconicity”. These graphical representations open up a field of both aesthetic and epistemic experience. They are not only a medium for the representation of objects of knowledge, but also at the same time an instrument through which those very objects can be *generated* and *explored*. Knowledge is not only represented and disseminated through the diagrammatic; it is produced and expanded by it.

This lecture will describe the role that the diagrammatic plays for thinking and understanding, and will ask how it realizes this role. Our assumption is that its cognitive function is to allow imperceptible theoretical objects to become visible and tactile. Imagination and thought become so closely tied in the diagrammatic that it allows us to undertake the perceptual investigation of otherwise imperceptible objects. Our hypothesis is that the epistemic function of operative iconicity is grounded in its particular connection between spatiality and graphism.

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