

Drawing a Hypothesis

Figures of Thought

A Project by
NIKOLAUS GANSTERER



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Completed the years between 2005 and 2011.

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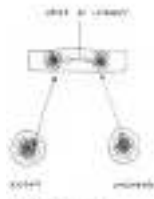


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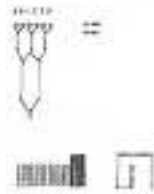


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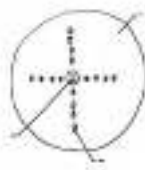


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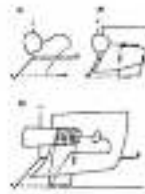


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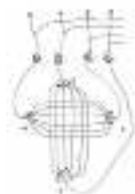


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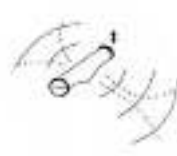


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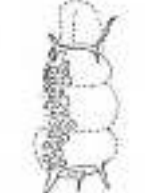


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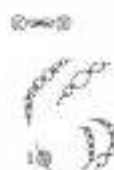


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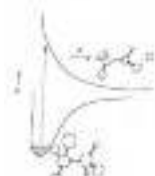


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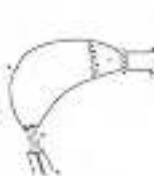


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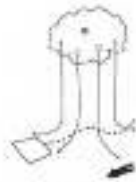


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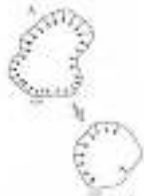


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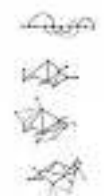


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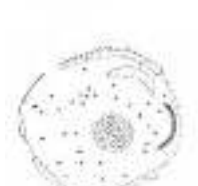


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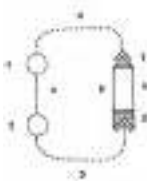


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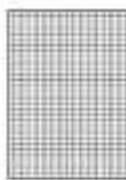


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— Preface —

DRAWING A HYPOTHESIS

Nikolaus Gershenfeld

The idea for this book originated during a two-year research project of the Jan van Eyck Academie in the Netherlands. My long-held fascination for diagrams, maps, networks and the graphical focus of visualising complex, non-linear, abstracted or to quote the title, from an inside point of view. This book has arisen from a five-year exchange with theoretical physicists and artists on the question of the topological potential of diagrams.

I began intuitively, by feeling, ordering and studying diagrams from books and the internet. Looking to understand how information is visually constructed within these representations, I internalised the language of images for myself by removing it. From this emerged a constructive practice which is still growing. The longer I worked with the material, the more I found myself asking how these figures were to be read, prior to their conventionalised between image, symbol and drawing. Moreover, how do they in turn configure our thought processes? What narrative forms can be found in these drawn objects of thought? And what happens when figures are removed from their original context? What action potential is the inherent?

Thinking Drawing – The part of diagrams and images and symbols is a permanent part of our daily perception. The cognitive act of perceiving, translating and ordering occurs continually when we organise thoughts and reading or process information. This process always happens through the establishing of relations and through drawing connections: the structures of the semantic relationships established in the neuronal organisation of our brains allows us to interact with others through language and behaviour. Since drawing can mediate between perception and reflection, it plays a constitutive role in the production and communication of knowledge. From my perspective, the genesis of ideas is often directly connected with graphical thinking. On the one hand, it is a creative practice

¹ For example, Carlo Winterstein carefully developed his *Diagrammatische Konstruktion* (1967) which originally set in order, with its thick, continuous lines, the lines of Carlo Scarpa's floor and wall-plans (links) with his graphic forms.

did and do begin with a quick draft to capture an idea, no place (I for oneself or other); on the other hand, hardly any other reflects the forms of visual representation when communicating its contents. The drawing of figures thus reveals itself to be one of the oldest of all mankind's natural techniques, and remains to this day a fundamental instrument in any kind of artistic or scientific practice.

Reverse Engineering of a Theory It was soon clear to me that I would have to open up my archive of figures to make them accessible to others, so opening them up to research into the potential of drawings. The figures I had drawn myself served as a starting point for the here collected hypotheses. They quickly became associative catalysts of an animated exchange with the most varied people from the most widely differing fields (artists, writers, scientists).

I sent my drawings to various correspondents with a request for a written interpretation (*Interpretation*), so that in turn I could read in their texts with their graphic drawings. The process worked much like a potlatch, for action was exchanged? Thought's role in intense processes and exchange of thoughts, the most varying ideas, symposia, theses and in relations developed, eventually receiving the form of captions (scientific notes and longer essays) or the forms of figure, drawing, hypothesis and diagram. The resulting contributions are of very different kinds, reflecting their authors' particular fields of knowledge in the innumerable borderland between art, science and fiction.

Out of this has emerged a complexions or conpendium of *fig. zone of thought* which straddles the border between scientific representability and artistic means. Without pretension to completeness, it reveals a world of lines which touches, penetrates and goes beyond significant aspects of the grammar. The figures I contain should always be understood – and here I would like to take up Karin Hausner's reference to Roland Barthes' thoughts¹ – as something moving, changing, living, flexible and kind to themselves. Through their ambivalent character they

¹ In the context of *Camera Lucida* (1980) and *Camera Obscura* (1988) Barthes writes: "The photograph is a kind of 'writing' that is inflexible, or sterner, than the author's prior or subsequent knowledge, or what might be his unconscious."

² In *Camera Lucida* (1980) Barthes writes: "The photograph is a kind of 'writing' that is inflexible, or sterner, than the author's prior or subsequent knowledge, or what might be his unconscious."

³ See *Camera Lucida*, p. 110.

reveal, to us a surprising glance into the near-visual manner of our consciousness, of the invisible mental spaces between reasoning and meaning.

Index of Figures – The figures themselves and the diverse ways of reading them are the perturbation of the publication. All the figures given in this book were drawn by hand by me. Many of them were sent to more than one person, for parallel interpretation. Consequently, these appear in several places in the book. To ensure easy tracking, each figure has its own number. The numbering follows the logic of their creation and indicates their place in my sketchbooks. The identifying number is given beside each particular figure as (Fig. XXX). A names and collection of all figures used in the publication can be found at the front. This provides both a visual list of contents and an orientation guide. The reader is invited to navigate through the book, to sail through and read into it, with the help of the Index of Figures.

The coloured image parts (Plate I–III) are distributed in three sections. Inspired by Aby Warburg's *Meaning of Images*, associative images are collected, which emerged in the course of the project as a visual response to the contributions. These draw a visual reference line between my own artwork and the figures found. At the end of *Let's Look* is a colour-coded folding map (→ Questions of Order and Relational Characteristics in Figures of Thought) which places key figures of thought within an ordered system.⁵

Acknowledgements – I would like to express my thanks here to all the authors for their fascinating interpretations and contributions, and for taking part in this experiment. Particular thanks are due to S. Maria Krieb, for investing so much time, inspiration, and time into the project, and for bringing it to fruition with me, in the form in which you now hold it in your hands.

I would also like to express my gratitude to the Jan van Eyck Academie, Maastricht; the University of Applied Arts, Vienna; and Bertak, the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education, Arts and Culture, for the excellent financial and creative support which has made this project possible.

Nikolaus Ganssner, Vienna 2001

⁵ This is called 'Index of Figures' in *Questions of Order and Relational Characteristics in Figures of Thought*. I would like to mention here the meaning of 'index' as 'something which is found' (Stam 1990: 116).

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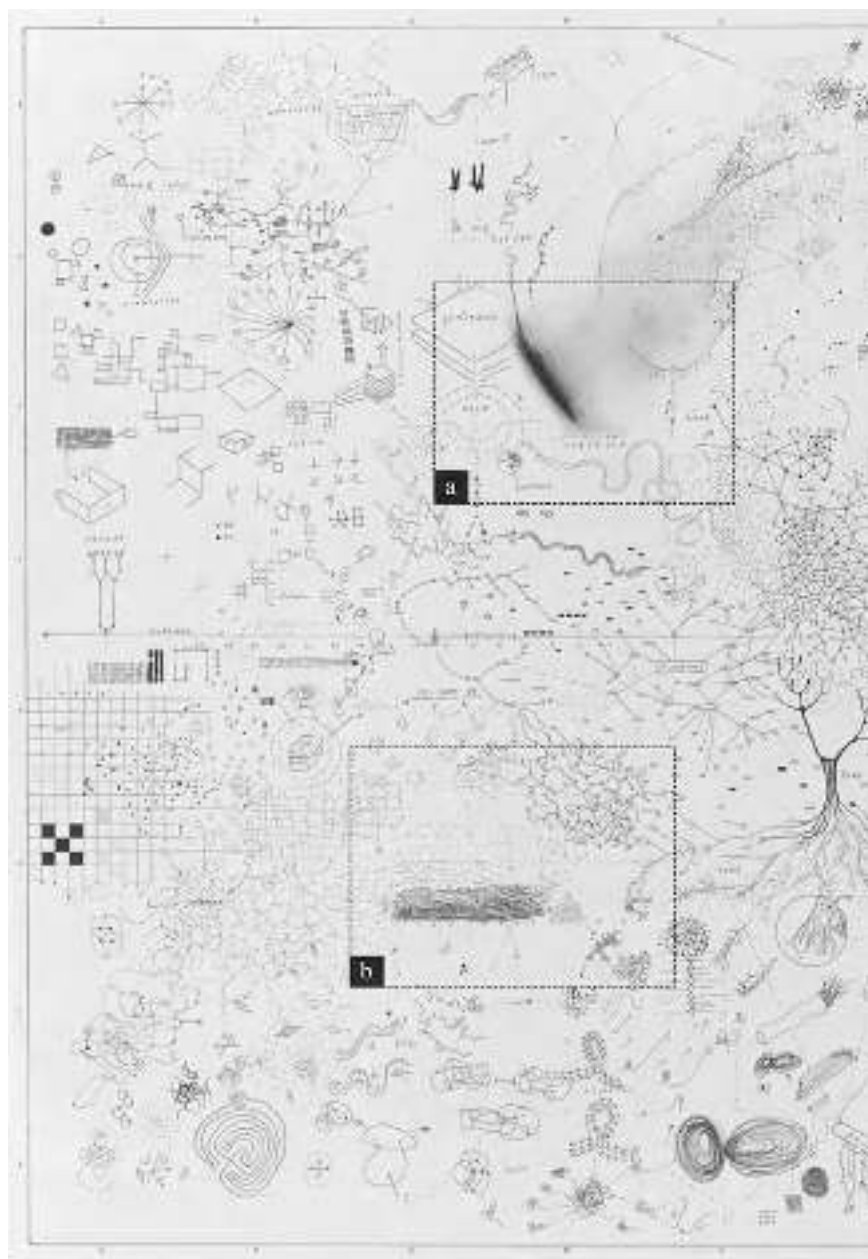


Fig. 1. Questions of Order and Structural Characteristics of Figures of Thought
(—removable folding margin; at the end of the book)

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