

Annotated Bibliography: *Diagram, Time, and Power*

(methods of contextualising)

2 texts from the reading list:

1,2

2 texts that you find outside the reading list:

3,4

2 design practices/projects:

5,6

1 *Rewriting reveals that form is not neutral.*

In *Exercises in Style*, Raymond Queneau retells the same simple event in ninety-nine different styles. The event itself does not change, but each version shifts the tone, emphasis, and perspective. As a result, the reader understands the same situation in different ways. This approach strongly relates to my project. Using the same commuting dataset, we produced multiple visualisations by altering temporal scale and structure. The data remained constant, yet the meaning changed. Responsibility, urgency, and political implication were redistributed through form.

Queneau's work reminds me that form is not a neutral container for content. It actively shapes how reality is constructed. In the same way, data visualisation does not simply present facts; it organises them. By repeating and transforming the same dataset, I began to understand visualisation as a process of rewriting rather than representing.

4 *Spatial arrangement produces meaning.*

In the AMO/OMA exhibition *Diagram*, diagrams from different historical and cultural contexts were placed side by side in a carefully structured sequence. Through this spatial arrangement, new relationships and dialogues emerged between the images. The exhibition did not simply present diagrams; it organised them. In this sense, the exhibition itself functioned as a diagram about diagrams. Arrangement and sequencing became mechanisms for producing meaning.

This curatorial structure influenced my own approach. I realised that the relationship between images is often shaped by how they are organised rather than by the content of each image alone.

As a result, I shifted my focus from analysing individual visualisations to examining the structures that connect them. By developing a manual for evaluating and producing diagrams, I aimed to make these organising conditions visible rather than leaving them implicit.

2 *Classification constructs national governance.*

In *Census, Map, Museum*, Benedict Anderson argues that the census, the map, and the museum are not neutral tools. Through systems of classification and visual order, they help construct national identity and political structures. This reading led me to reconsider the role of data visualisation. It is not simply a way to present information; it first establishes the framework through which information is understood.

In our initial presentation, my group focused heavily on logic and internal consistency. However, this pursuit of rationality resulted in a lack of clear position. Revisiting Anderson's text made me realise that ignoring the container and the method means ignoring the political dimension of form. As a result, I shifted my project toward constructing a manual for producing carbon-related infographics. While such a guide appears systematic and reasonable, it also reveals how data can be organised and controlled through predefined rules.

Anderson's argument helped me understand that design does not only produce images; it defines the conditions under which knowledge becomes visible.

5 *Thematic framing embeds the diagram within political contexts.*

In the book *Diagram* by AMO/OMA, diagrams are not organised by technical development or design movements. Instead, they are grouped under themes such as inequality, environment, war, and truth. This thematic structure places diagrams within specific social and political contexts. Rather than presenting diagrams as neutral design tools, the book suggests that they participate in how societies organise knowledge and power.

This framework influenced my own project. I began to see that data visualisation is also embedded within political and institutional systems. It does not simply present information; it structures it. As a result, I shifted my research toward developing a manual for producing carbon-related diagrams. By focusing on classification and rule-making, I aimed to expose how visual systems shape responsibility and understanding within environmental discourse.

3 *Structure functions as a tool of resistance.*

In *W. E. B. Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America*, Du Bois transforms statistical data into strong visual arguments. Unlike conventional charts, he places the timeline at the top of the image, reversing the usual reading direction.

Large dark areas dominate the composition, turning slavery into visual weight. White areas blend into the paper background, making whiteness appear as the default condition. Through colour, scale, and spatial arrangement, data becomes a physical presence rather than a neutral display.

This work helped me understand that data visualisation can function as political intervention. In my project, changing temporal scale and structure similarly reshapes responsibility and historical narrative. Du Bois demonstrates that diagrams are not passive representations of information; they can actively challenge existing power structures.

6 *Visual structure implies political and economic positions.*

In *The Statistical Breviary*, William Playfair combines circles and vertical lines to present land area, population, and revenue for different nations. The size of each circle represents territory, while the vertical lines show population and taxes. A dotted line connects the two values, indicating the tax burden. Although the data is numerical, the visual structure is not neutral. The direction of the dotted line suggests whether taxation is heavy or light. In some cases, the sharp angles resemble blade-like forms, intensifying the perception of pressure.

This example helped me understand that statistical graphics do more than display information. Their structure shapes interpretation. In my project, changing temporal scale and visual form similarly alters how responsibility and urgency are perceived. Playfair's work demonstrates that visual organisation itself carries ideological meaning.