I Introduction

In a series of moderately scaled, two-dimensional works on paper, Janice Kerbel uses the rhetoric of architectural diagrams to create an imaginary architecture replete with poetic charge. What is distinct about Kerbel’s work is that, rather than tracing realizable projects, her diagrams are an end in themselves; their overarching theme is the potentiality that permeates all diagrams. In this way, Kerbel’s works are self-reflexive; they illustrate the inner workings of the visual process of the mind. At the same time, her works are cryptic and enigmatic. One way to understand Kerbel’s work is to relate it to the theory of the diagram in philosophy. Indeed, Kerbel’s works seem to conjugate artistically key philosophical concepts in this field.

To draw a diagram, according to the word’s etymology, is to mark up a space with lines. This is precisely what Kerbel does: her architectural drawings consist of black lines on white surfaces, precisely drawn or printed. In some cases, she includes measurements and captions which describe the objects, their dimensions, or nature. As a philosophical concept, the diagram is what allows us to proceed from that which is not there—a virtual potentiality—to a material object, an actuality. Kerbel’s artistic practice questions—and occupies the space of—this transition.

A diagram is not a precise plan that represents a reality, nor does it announce an actual building that will be constructed. The architect Peter Eisenman, in his reflection on the nature of the diagram, sees potential for virtual space in the diagrammatic practice:

Generically, a diagram is a graphic shorthand. Though it is an ideogram, it is not necessarily an abstraction. It is a representation of something in that it is not the thing itself. In this sense, it cannot help but be embodied .... While it explains relationships in an architectural object, it is not isomorphic with it.
In this sense, the diagram is a concept that opens a gap between what is imagined and the yet-to-be-built. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, the diagram: “... does not function to represent, even something real, but rather constructs a real that is yet to come, a new type of reality.” The diagram is therefore an ontological device situated somewhere before the formal aspect of things. Kerbel’s drawings, because they are architectural, relate to this concept in the sense that they seem to suggest the preliminary stage of a structure or object before it is fully realized.

But a diagram does more than represent potentiality; it is also a simple representation of something more complex. As Eisenman says, it is a form of graphic shorthand. However, as Sanford Kwinter explains, the simplicity of a diagram does not take away from the object represented. It does not reduce it, but rather folds it. The diagram effectively makes the object smaller, so that it can then be unfolded for the purpose of understanding its meaning: “... once complicated or enfolded, every worldly thing harbours within itself the perpetual capacity to explicate or unfold.” With black lines on white, flat surfaces and dimensions of measures and legends, Kerbel seems to fit into restrained elements something that is far more grand.

As a result of her work’s economy, Kerbel’s diagrams walk the line between the objective and subjective, the standard and personal, the actual and virtual. In this essay, I explore a selection of Kerbel’s works in relation to philosophers who study the notion of the diagram. Drawing on the phenomenology of Walter Benjamin and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, I analyze *Home Fittings*, 2004, to determine the relationship between the body and the architectural plan. In concert with Kant’s concept of the schema and Hannah Arendt’s idea of the image, I analyze *Home Conjuring Unit*, 2000, to see how a diagram illustrates the mechanism of the imagination. Finally, I consider Kerbel’s *Home Climate Gardens*, 2004, by using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s concept of the frame in order to see how the philosophical concept of the diagram articulates the connection of our personal experience to a greater whole. When considered in conjunction with these philosophers’ concepts, the diagram in Kerbel’s works can be seen to question the relationship between representation and thought, the nature of an image, and the connection that is made between the objective rhetoric of the architectural plan and the viewer’s imagination.

The reader will note that the idea of “home” links Kerbel’s works together. In fact, “home” forms part of the title of all of the works considered in this essay. But in each work, “home” has a different resonance. In *Home Fittings*, “home” stands in for a generic space and one that is not necessarily domestic; in *Home Conjuring Unit*, it conveys something convenient and intimate; while in *Home Climate Gardens*, “home” is aligned with the idea of sheltering oneself from a polluted atmosphere. Thus, in Kerbel’s works, the idea of “home” seems to have significant conceptual breadth. The multiple meanings of “home” in her work aptly reflect the artist’s negotiation between the objective and subjective, as well as the general and personal. In other words, “home” is a subject elastic enough to be conveyed diagrammatically and expansive...
enough to conjure rich memories, ideas, and associations that are vastly different for each viewer.

II  Home Fittings

Kerbel’s Home Fittings #01–13 Soundlines: where to walk so no creaks are heard, Sightlines: where to stand so no shadows cast around corners, 2000–2009, is a suite of 18 hand-drawn floor plans of buildings—all of which reference the art centers or galleries that commissioned the artist to “map” their spaces according to mysterious criteria that the drawing’s subtitles reveal: Soundlines: where to walk so no creaks can be heard, and Sightlines: where to stand so no shadows cast around corners. Kerbel researched each drawing by walking through a building and taking note of spaces where the floors made no sound under her feet or where she could stand without casting a shadow. With short vertical and horizontal lines on the plans, the artist indicates where she was able to stand and remain silent and invisible to potential co-occupants of the gallery space. The floor plans are scored with such dashes, indicating the spots which help the artist camouflage herself in plain sight. Of course, in order to do this, Kerbel first had to negotiate the space between her body and various architectural structures.

One representative drawing, Admiralitätstr. 71 Hamburg, 4th floor, Scale 1:25—Soundlines—Sightlines, 2004, is of the Galerie Karin Guether in Hamburg, the address of which is indicated in the title and on the work in the bottom right-hand corner (Fig. 15.1). At first sight, the drawing seems to consist of inchoate sketches for a Mondrian painting. Short vertical and horizontal graphite dashes are arranged therein, and scattered lines are herded together by longer, paler lines which trace an irregular frame, resembling the external architecture of a building floor plan. Rather than showing such basic elements as walls or columns, these dashes mark specific places, the significance of which the titles underscore:—Soundlines—Sightlines in this particular work is short for the revealing title of the entire suite: Soundlines: where to walk so no creaks can be heard, Sightlines: where to stand so no shadows cast around corners.

During the exhibition of this plan, Kerbel’s drawing was accompanied by a series of brass plinths embedded into the hardwood floors of the gallery space; as the visitors to the gallery soon understood, these plinths corresponded to the dashes in Kerbel’s drawing. These plinths marked the real space of the gallery and made the drawing accessible to the viewer. But the drawing itself, taken away from the immediacy of the first exhibition, necessarily makes the relationship of the viewer to the space more vague.
Home Fittings displays an unusually personal or subjective aspect of the diagram, lending some ambiguity to the work. Kerbel attributes this ambiguity to the signs that comprise the drawing: “I liked the idea that there was clearly this code when you looked at the works. The markings signaled this code but you weren’t really sure what the code was. I wanted them to be as discreet as possible.” Kerbel’s indications are specific to the artist, since she is the one who conducted the ground research by exploring the gallery space with her body. But the questions left unanswered for outside viewers are many: will the markings support a body of any weight, and hide any sized body? Kerbel experiences the space herself; thus, viewers cannot assume that designated spots on the floor will also remain quiet for them. If the body is heavier than the artist’s, then the floor might creak, since the floors of some of the buildings she was commissioned to map are old. And what if the floor settled since the plan was drawn? In such a case, could Kerbel herself, let alone another person, replicate the experience?

In view of the subjective and arbitrary dimension of Kerbel’s work, her drawing can be described as a personalized map or path placed onto an objective floor plan. The map charts the artist’s relationship to the space, instead of determining, more traditionally, the objective measurements of the space depicted in the drawing. But, as noted, the map serves as an incomplete guide. Kerbel does not explain how to get from one location to the next: “As the title indicates, the floor plans are covered with small marks that specify the areas of safe passage. If the maps are properly followed, one could, assumedly, move through these spaces undetected. What one does to navigate from one safe space to the next, however, is not described.” Indeed, the plan might be pragmatically unusable.

What is more, the ultimate purpose of the plan is not clear. What Kerbel in fact creates is a contemplative situation of the plan itself: “Sightlines and Soundlines are beautiful, fine maps. Like most maps, we see only the signs and not the referent.” This elusive reference to Kerbel’s seemingly explanatory title and unexplained signs only adds to the mysteriously clandestine quality of the artist’s intentions, which remain elusive to the viewer: the purpose of the map is to be silent and invisible in the gallery, but the reasons why one might wish to be so are not made clear. Kerbel’s drawing identifies places in the room where the body comes into a particular kind of contact with architecture in order to disappear: “Home Fittings … identifies places in particular rooms where one can stand so as not to throw a shadow, or paths one can take without making a sound. These instructions help one find something (a location) and then lose something (oneself).” The plan reveals a motive personal to the artist: appearance and disappearance. The viewer is never really told why the artist might want to disappear. The plans, although seemingly objective because they borrow the conventions of the architectural plan or diagram, are actually quite personal to the artist, both in their design and their admittedly opaque purpose.
Adding to the cryptic quality of the plan is the use of the word “home” in Kerbel’s title: why use the title *Home Fittings* in a drawing that maps out a public space? This, too, is left open to interpretation. The “home” of the title is vestigial: the artist began this project by mapping out residential houses and, later, while working on commission in galleries, she left this designation in place, since her process was essentially the same.9 I would suggest that “home” in this title expresses the word’s etymological sense: from the Greek koinan, to put to sleep—in other words, a resting place, where the body comes to rest.

What Kerbel achieves with *Home Fittings* is a subversion of our expectations vis-à-vis a plan by introducing an element that is ubiquitous—the body—but at the same time equivocal. These two elements, the subjective body and the rigid plan, bring attention to the incommensurability between our representation of space (which is often assumed to be objective) and an individual’s presumptively subjective perception and experience of it. The incommensurability between the way that vision and the body map out space is the operative principle in Kerbel’s work. It is the difference between how we see architecture and how we experience architecture. This is the incommensurability that underwrites, in Kerbel’s drawings, how we visualize or imagine a space, in contrast to the actuality of inserting our body within the space (which might undermine the plan).

A distinction between the body and vision is important for an understanding of a phenomenological diagram as described by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. But before we address this issue, we have to remind ourselves that the duality between the body and vision is a fundamental part of architecture itself. Walter Benjamin ends his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” with an apt reflection on architecture and its reception through the body and vision. For Benjamin, “architecture has always represented the prototype of a work of art …”10 Architecture serves as a prototype because it is the first art created by humankind, and it is in a constant state of evolution. And whereas certain artistic forms have come and gone out of fashion, “the human need for shelter is lasting.”11 The reception of architecture is significant for Benjamin because it informs two different senses: “Buildings are appropriated in a twofold manner: by use and by perception—or rather, by touch and sight.”12 Kerbel’s work makes use of this haptic or tactile element of architecture because her process involves a contact with the space that she is mapping before she describes it in the language of an architectural plan. In effect, Kerbel’s work involves making us see what normally we would only feel.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in “Eye and Mind,” describes the phenomenology of vision based on the holistic integration of vision and the mind into a complete, active relationship with the surrounding world: “The painter ‘takes his body with him’ …” The mind cannot paint and needs the support of the body. He explains:
In principle all my changes of place figure in a corner of my landscape; they are recorded on the map of the visible. Everything I see is in principle within my reach, at least within reach of my sight, and is marked upon the map of the “I can.” Each of the two maps is complete. The visible world and the world of my motor projects are each total parts of the same Being.  

This negotiation between two maps is precisely the approach taken by Kerbel in *Home Fittings*. She is not simply drawing a plan of the house, but also shows how a body fits into it. And not simply in terms of measure, but also in terms of the weight and sensation, and the way that the body sees and moves around a space. It is in this way that Kerbel subverts the whole principle of drawing a plan. Her simple geometric drawing of vertical and horizontal lines bears witness to two maps: that of the building (the outline of its walls) and that of the body (represented by the dashes) within the building’s parameters.

Based on the difference between body and mind mediated by vision, Merleau-Ponty develops a theory of the diagram. Instead of being a plan drawn on paper, Merleau-Ponty’s diagram is a process of negotiation between the inside and the outside of the body. Kerbel’s plans imitate this negotiation and, I would contend, illustrate artistically Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical concept. It is the imagination that carries us into the room that Kerbel has drawn. How the imagination expands into space through the body is the cornerstone of Merleau-Ponty’s presentation of the philosophy of phenomenology. The diagram is more than a drawing on paper; it is not only a way for our body to configure its surrounding space, but is also, in fact, what mediatates between thought and the experience of that thought. For Merleau-Ponty, the imaginary is “in my body as diagram of the life of the actual.” Therefore, what we imagine is a diagram of what we live and experience is, in effect, a map of one’s own body and one’s own experience of being in that body, moving through space. The imaginary also “offers to our sight [regard], so that it might join with them, the inward traces of vision, and because it offers to vision its inward tapestries, the imaginary texture of the real.” The imaginary offers to what we see the traces of our internal vision, and reciprocally offers to our internal vision the tapestries of the externally sensed. The way we think of our vision is tainted with the traces of the real to which we give an artificial form. So the imaginary actively constructs our reality and how we think that we perceive our reality. The fact that the real is tainted by perception, which itself is constructed out of elements of reality (how else, Merleau-Ponty asks, could we imagine our vision than with elements of our outer experience?), is what ultimately animates Kerbel’s *Home Fittings*. It gives the two-dimensional diagram phantasmagorical dimensions which blend spaces real, illustrated, and imagined.

With Kerbel, we are always at the self-conscious state of the imaginary. The perceptible gap between two sorts of experience is attributed to what she calls the transitional aspect of her work:
Work that suggests a particular state, but a state you can’t get to. The plan can be thought of as something that exists in its own reality, instead of the next stage. I wanted to make that next stage impossible or implausible: somehow you can’t get there, and that leaves the plan as something in its own right. But it holds on to that tension of the next stage.\textsuperscript{16}

Diagrams are drawings announcing a potential subsequent stage, something that is beyond them chronologically. But, of course, beyond here can also be taken to mean something that lies beyond the scope of ordinary experience. By focusing on this essential aspect of the diagram, Kerbel provides it with its own reality and therefore opens a new dimension. She shows us how to capture the inchoate and give it a form. Her diagrams are not about the precision of the plan or the subject that they showcase but, in the most abstract sense, the potential that they carry. \textit{Home Fittings}, with its precise dashes and pale frames, is more than a floor plan: it is an imaginary landscape.

\section*{III \textit{Home Conjuring Unit}}

\textit{Home Conjuring Unit}, 2000, is a double-sided blueprint featuring practical, diagrammatic instructions for building furniture that can be used to practice various magic tricks—for example, floating on air or being split in two—within a domestic context. On one side of the paper, Kerbel has drawn the instructions to build modules, the building blocks, as it were, that can be configured into different pieces of furniture which are represented in axiomatic perspectives on the other side of the page (Figs. 15.2 and 15.3). There, the artist shows how to put the modules into varying configurations in order to build a wardrobe, a trestle table, nesting tables, and a chest. This work therefore illustrates another aspect of the concept of the diagram. The diagram as building instructions—not an image that represents reality, as would a painting or a photograph of a piece of furniture. Instead, on this account, the diagram is a schematic rendering, with measurements and instructions, designed to convey the steps needed in order to recreate an actual object. The diagram of a wardrobe, in this case, looks less real than a realist painting of a wardrobe, but conveys more precise information and therefore reveals more about the practical aspect of the thing. By showing less, the diagram actually conveys more and stands at the juncture between an empirical object that can be captured by our senses and the intellectual concept that we have of an object in general; it is not the particular wardrobe standing before us, but “a wardrobe” that appears in the mind when we hear the word. In this way, Kerbel’s work leads us to another philosopher associated with the diagram, Immanuel Kant, who negotiates between the sensible and the conceptual.

Unlike \textit{Home Fittings}, which is a hand-drawn suite, Kerbel’s \textit{Home Conjuring Unit} is a digital print on paper. If \textit{Home Fittings} displayed haptic traces made by the hand of the artist, in this work, the personal touch
of graphite on paper is foregone in favour of precisely rendered digital lines. Of these computer-generated networks of black lines on white backgrounds, one critic observed: “printed at half-scale onto large white sheets of paper, her cold clean plans describe minimalist spaces emptied of untidy bodies … [p]otential appears in the form of an absence.” Since Kerbel is a Canadian artist living in London, it is important to remember that she uses the British Scale where 1:1 is 1mm:100m. The prints are therefore not to be read in full scale. This work, at first sight, does have an austere and complex look. But the subject of these drawings, contrary to their functional aesthetic, is whimsical. These drawings are clearly made for mass understanding: the representational technique used is the axonometric view, typical in do-it-yourself assembly instructions for home furniture. However, each axonometric view is labelled with the magical function that each piece of furniture is meant to perform. With this in mind, another critic imagines the playful activity that would surround the subject of the work if it were ever constructed by someone willing to move from plan to execution:

[F]or amateur magicians, Kerbel has devised a Multi-functional Conjuring Unit. This is a diagram for the construction of a single piece of household furniture to be used for various magic tricks that would be very convenient if applied to real life. There is the bedroom wardrobe for spontaneous appearance, the work table for floating on
air, the storage chest for splitting in two, and the fitted-end tables for quick and easy escape. Designed as a flat-pack unit (all accessories included) it can be formed and reformed to provide novices with the means to perform standard magic acts in the comfort of their own homes.  

On one side of the double-sided work, we have the standard modules which will be part of each piece of furniture in different configurations. On the other, we find the furniture pieces such as the wardrobe, the trestle table, storage chest, and nest tables. These are familiar pieces of furniture but with a twist. If built according to the blueprint specifications, they ostensibly repeat the appearance/disappearance theme of Home Fittings. The body can suddenly appear, levitate, split in two, or disappear. The blueprint shows how the piece of furniture is to be constructed, and the viewers can imagine how they can eclipse reality without leaving the confines of their home.

Diagrams are a particular type of image: essentially, they are instructions that mediate between an idea of an object and an actual object. Traditionally, the diagram is not an image that is meant to be contemplated in itself; it is, instead, a set of practical instructions that potentially guide us in the realization of an object. Instead of depicting in an illusory fashion a piece of furniture (think of Van Gogh’s well-known painting of his chair from 1888), the diagram depicts something that does not yet exist. It is at the crux between the idea of an object—its intellectual representation—and the object standing

15.3 Janice Kerbel, Home Conjuring Unit, 2000, 23 3/8 × 33 1/16 in (59.4 × 84 cm), double-sided digital inkjet print. Courtesy of greengrassi, London.
in one’s home after being made according to plan—an actual object. In this transitional stage, the diagram self-reflexively comments on the very nature of representation.

At a fundamental level, by choosing to render her image of furniture through the device of the diagram, Kerbel questions the duality of representation that is at once sensible and conceptual. This is also the problem that Kant tackles with his concept of the schema. In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant describes the schema as “a hidden art in the depths of the human soul, whose true operations we can divine from nature and lay unveiled before our eyes only with difficulty.” The schema is responsible for the conversion, through subsumption, of empirical objects of intuition into concepts of pure understanding. The device is powered by imagination. Kant says that there is an incommensurability between objects in concreto and their pure concepts. Therefore there must be a third term that maintains a relation of homogeneity between empirical objects which Kant calls “phenomena” and concepts, which are part of the “categories.” This third, mediating representation must straddle the intellectual and the sensible sides. In very broad strokes, from an aesthetic perspective, the schema bridges the empirical (objects such as a wardrobe standing before us) and the intellectual (grasping what a wardrobe is and how it functions, for example). In order to do that, this third term must provide an image to the concept. But, of course, images are sensible things—they appeal to the senses—whereas concepts are part of pure understanding and therefore not part of sensible things. So what is this image of the wardrobe that cannot look exactly like a wardrobe? This image, which Kant will call the schema, is a bit sketchy. Kant likens it to a monogram: a picture in lines only, otherwise known as an outline. He says that the schema contains contours of the object. In other words, it would not have all the elements of a real wardrobe, or all of the details that might inform of a representation of a wardrobe. This would involve too much information to register conceptually. Let us say that when making the wardrobe cross over from the sensible to the intellectual, it would be better to have a more schematic rendering, something lighter, with less visual content but more intellectual information. In short, the diagram functions like the schema: it looks less like a picture of an empirical wardrobe, and it conveys information that would not be accessible to the eye.

So what kind of representation is a diagram? It is a peculiar type of image. One helpful way to understand this aesthetic object is to consider how Hannah Arendt describes the Kantian schema as an image that uses the vocabulary of vision, which is helpful in the context of art analysis. She explains how imagination works by transforming an empirical object and “providing an image for a concept.” Such an image is called a ‘schema.’ This image cannot be witnessed empirically: “it is not given even to ‘the eyes of the mind.’” The schema is not an image as representation; it is, rather, like an image. A diagram (in the form of an architectural drawing)—
although itself an empirical, perceptible thing—seems to parallel on paper how a schema works in philosophy. The schema lies somewhere between the empirical (sensibility) and intellectual (thought):

… Yet, though it exists in thought only, it is a kind of “image”; it is not a product of thought, nor is it given to sensibility; and least of all is it the product of an abstraction from sensibly given data. It is something beyond or between thought and sensibility; it belongs to thought insofar as it is outwardly invisible, and it belongs to sensibility insofar as it is something like an image.\(^{24}\)

The schematized object exists between what we see and how we think about it. The diagrammed object, on the other hand, is located somewhere between the graphic representation of its structure and its actual structure.

Like Arendt’s image of an object, Kerbel’s *Home Conjuring Unit* stages this schematic sleight-of-hand: the value of the work lies precisely in what is not there. The invisible dimension is a promise that exists within the lines of the architectural diagram, but it is the viewer’s realization (and workings of their imagination) that turns the diagram into the repository of the possible. *Home Conjuring Unit* articulates the mechanics of the schema and self-reflexively questions the nature of art as a practice of representation. The diagram, by standing in an inchoate state between the thing and the idea of the thing, reveals the potentiality that this unformed dimension contains in the guise of simple lines. If *Home Fittings* represented the diagram as a way for the body to navigate space, *Home Conjuring Unit* illustrates the multiple dimensions that an image occupies in the mind. Next, the diagram will connect us to something beyond our body and mind, namely our environment and, ultimately, the universe.

**IV Home Climate Gardens**

In her *Home Climate Gardens* series, 2004, Kerbel exposes how an architectural diagram can forgo the object it is predestined to announce and open up a vaster frame of experience which stretches towards the systematic or universal. Her drawings of gardens are in fact meant to comment on our position on the earth and within the larger universe. The plants in the gardens are stand-ins for the human body, which was already elliptically present in the other works. These gardens are a lifeline to a projected future when the artist imagines the city encroaching on nature to such an extent that vegetal life only dwells indoors. The diagram, by coolly articulating the potential of things to come, frames our precarious connection to the earth.

Kerbel’s *Home Climate Gardens* series consists of plans for growing gardens indoors. The series of inkjet prints contains nine plans or blueprints for gardens designed for very specific architectures within an urban environment. They are specific to urban spaces: launderette, gym, revolving restaurant, and council housing are some examples featured in the series.
The gardens are planned to occupy space with maximum efficiency—they hang from the ceiling of the launderette, they are on the walls of the council housing, they are high up in the space of the gym, and so on. Each of the digitally printed drawings consists of clear and simple circular shapes that refer to specific configurations of plants and which seem to have been designed with the help of an architectural template. The format of each drawing is the same: in the center, we have the plan of the garden. In the top right corner, we see the geographical location of the garden given an arrow oriented to the north. At the bottom right corner, the title and subtitle (for example, *Revolving Restaurant: Windowbox Garden; Student Housing: Bookshelf Garden;* or *Council Flat: Wall-mounted Garden*) are indicated. Beneath the subtitle, Kerbel includes statistics particular to each garden. These include the average summer temperature, average winter temperature, nightly temperature drop, and average humidity. The temperatures are provided in degrees Celsius. To the left of this information, in the margins of the drawing, there is a little plan of the configuration of the architectural space where the garden is to grow. The plan is drawn in thin pale lines while the garden features are in bold. In the left bottom corner of the drawing, Kerbel lists the plants that are part of the plan. These are written in Latin next to the abbreviations that are indicated in the circular pattern in the main part of the drawing. The gardens must be kept alive—this is why Kerbel does meticulous research in order to find which plants can survive in which conditions (sun exposure in a rotating restaurant or humidity levels in a launderette, for example). Finally, in the top left corner, there is an elevation drawing of the garden itself, in profile. For example, the gardens of the launderette are suspended in semicircular containers; the council flat gardens are planted in box-like containers. All of the drawings of the series are precise, austere, and elegant.

Beyond the elements traced on the paper itself, the plans seem to be made in the expectation of a future when the only space for gardens is indoors. It is the nature of the plan that allows us to organize information. The information that it organizes can help us connect our present to a future (the yet-to-be-built). This kind of planning—in the temporal sense of the term—is of manifest importance in this series. Using the lines of the diagram, we can study the potential of the plan and not have an image presented to us, but rather—and necessarily—develop it for ourselves. In the case of *Home Climate Gardens*, lines drawn on paper make us conscious of our place within the environment and, by extension, make us ponder our connection to the world.

By way of example, consider *Loft: Mobile Garden*, 2004 (Fig. 15.4). *Loft*, in the Old Saxon and Old High German *luft*, means air. The question of the atmosphere is conjured by a simple word, loft, the “o” of which is repeated in the circles that represent the planned vegetation of the plan. Loft evokes images of urban landscapes but also the position of the loft apartment (*loft*, from the Old Norse *loft*: upper room, sky). The mobile platforms of the
garden, as the plan shows, can be moved around the open space of the loft. At the same time, these platforms can be read as symbols for tectonic plates: large swaths of earth moving in geological time. Here, instead of tectonic plates moving continents, we have small interlocking frames, rolling on floors, as the inset of the plan indicates in detail. A single, curved arrow in the lower right-hand corner indicates the direction of the path of the frames within the limits of the loft. The curved arrow designates an orbit and perhaps reflects the interstellar origins of the work: “Janice Kerbel learnt that in 1980 NASA had promoted the benefits of plants inside space stations as an inexpensive, low-tech, eco-friendly means of removing pollutants from the air of the home and the workplace.” Kerbel’s gardens are linked to the cosmos through the element of air: the garden, like a space capsule, produces its own air. On earth, plants produce oxygen. From this, one can draw a simple analogy: the garden in the loft is what the earth is, relative to the cosmos.

The diagram allows us to consider our place within a larger whole. We have seen already how the diagram folds and unfolds information. It contracts reality into simple graphic signs and explicates, intellectually unfolds this reality by augmenting it and by connecting it to something larger. For Gilles Deleuze, the diagram, which is, at its point of origin, architectural, is a philosophical way of looking at the world in an abstracted way. Following Foucault, he writes that the diagram is “functioning,
abstracted from any obstacle … or friction [which] must be detached from any specific use.” 26 The diagram, because it is abstract, can be applied not to a single specific situation, but to heterogeneous situations. By getting rid of specific elements, the traits of the diagram are peripatetic. These traits can easily be connected to other traits devoid of specificity and therefore form new arrangements.

In order to apply this philosophical concept of the diagram to architecture, we first have to see what architecture means for Deleuze and Félix Guattari. In What is Philosophy?, Deleuze and Guattari see architecture for its essential traits. Instead of discussing architecture in specific terms (description or analysis of particular buildings), they take as their example of architecture the generic house. The essential element of the house, like the traits in a diagram, is the frame. Architecture, for Deleuze and Guattari, is the “first art of the frame.” 27 But the frame is also the essential function of the house. The frame of the house is not only part of the structure of an architectural building, but also, on a philosophical level, makes connections possible. The house, because of its position on the ground, links up the earth to the sky. First, the house frames the body by shielding the flesh: “[t]he body blossoms in the house ...” 28 Then the house carries out a deframing. The house unfolds. This is a process of abstraction where the house is seen not in particular terms, as a singular house, but rather in its essential traits: frames, vectors, abstract lines.

Interlocking these frames or joining up all these planes—wall section, window section, floor section—is a composite system rich in points and counterpoints … a vast plane of composition that carries out a kind of deframing following lines of flight that pass through the house-territory to town-cosmos, and that now dissolve the identity of the place through variation of the earth, a town having not so much a place as vectors folding the abstract line of relief. 29

This passage is complex, but what Deleuze and Guattari endeavor to explain is that architecture functions diagrammatically. Frames connect the structure of the house and so, taken abstractly, the function of architecture is connection. The lines that make up the house are vectors, abstractly calling into question the relationship of architecture to space. All these abstract elements can then connect with others, constantly putting into question the stability of our position on the earth. As Deleuze and Guattari write: “Not only does the open house communicate with the landscape, through a window or a mirror, but the most shut-up house opens to a universe.” 30 The body that was first framed, or sheltered by the house, is then unfolded, deframed, or connected to a vaster experience. The diagram of a house is a revelatory framing of experience and our connection to a larger whole.

What Kerbel’s diagrams of gardens make us realize is that there is a world beyond the immediate body, beyond our immediate surroundings. Using architectural diagrams of internal spaces—“homes”—as a protected
zone in which gardens can thrive, Kerbel’s *Home Climate Gardens* series conveys Deleuze and Guattari’s theory of the diagram by commenting on the relationship between “home” and the world outside the home, or the frame and the world outside the frame. This, in turn, connects the individual to nature through a simple architectural diagram. In order to effectively communicate the urgency of our position within the environment and our connection to nature, Kerbel does not take the alarmist or sentimental route to convey her message. Instead, she uses the cold and calculated diagrammatic strategy of simple lines that need to be interpreted by the viewer in order to make a connection between him or herself, the home gardens conveyed, and a vaster, collective space, which is the earth and, ultimately, the universe. The abstracting function of the diagram is what gives us an accurate picture, making small gardens stand in for our connection to the world.

V Conclusion

The drawings that Kerbel makes of homes conjugate various aspects of the theory of the diagram. First, with *Home Fittings*, the diagram is what negotiates between body and vision within an architectural plan of a building superimposed with personal marks that relate the position of the artist’s body in the room. Second, as illustrated by *Home Conjuring Unit*, the diagram is a peculiar image: not exactly representational and rather intellectual in its affect. This type of diagram parallels the function of Kant’s schema, compressing the real into a sketch that is then unfolded in pure reason in the form of a concept. And, third, the diagram is considered in terms of traits and lines that connect a simple black-and-white drawing to a larger world and purpose. As *Home Climate Gardens* warns us, we are dependent on the environment that surrounds us, even if only in the form of house plants. Taken together, Kerbel’s various depictions of architectural spaces intersect with the theory of the diagram considered by philosophers such as Merleau-Ponty, Kant, and Deleuze and Guattari. They fold complex information into economical designs so that they can be interpreted intellectually by the viewer, and they illustrate, beyond the spaces that they trace, a potential dimension. Kerbel accomplishes all of this with the nimble, clear, and paradoxically flat diagram.

In sum, Kerbel’s drawings are not just diagrammatic representations of particular objects such as floor plans, magical furniture, or gardens that remind us of our connection to the earth. In addition, her work can also be appreciated as theory. Intrigued by content that is simultaneously straightforward and opaque, beholders are also invited to reflect, in a more abstract sense, on the form to which she consistently returns. At once form and content, the diagram is, in Kerbel’s hands, more than a graphic shorthand: indeed, it folds in and unfolds the very mechanics of our perception and imagination.
Notes


8. Ibid.


11. Ibid., 240.

12. Ibid.


15. Ibid.


20. Ibid., A 138/B177.

21. Ibid., A 833/B861.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 82.


28 Ibid., 179.

29 Ibid.

30 Ibid., 180.